



9th February 2016

Key messages on the Government's plans for community pharmacy in 2016/17 and beyond

Introduction and background

On 17th December 2015 the Government announced a number of plans for community pharmacy via an open letter to PSNC. The proposals included a £170m reduction in funding for community pharmacy in 2016/17. Since publication of the letter it has also become clear that as many as 3,000 pharmacies may close, that Establishment payments will be phased out, and that there may be a drive towards a commoditised supply service with an increased focus on warehouse dispensing and online services.

PSNC and other national pharmacy organisations believe the proposals pose significant threats to both the community pharmacy network and patient care, and we are working together to coordinate campaigning work to influence the Government. This briefing sets out a number of key messages which contractors and LPCs may find helpful to get across in any conversations with MPs, councillors, local commissioners, patient representatives or others.

Messages and actions summary

There are three key themes that we need to get across to stakeholders about what is happening at the moment:

1. Pharmacies are a valuable and valued resource
2. The Government's plans threaten patient access to pharmacies and pharmacy services
3. The implications for patient care have not been properly considered and may be damaging

The messages outlined below are designed to feed into these key themes and to suggest actions and next steps from the Government.

Pharmacies are a valuable and valued resource

- People in England make 1.6 million visits to community pharmacies every day.
- As well as dispensing medicines community pharmacy teams help people to stay well and out of the GP's surgery, to get the most benefit from their medicines, and to manage their health conditions.
- Pharmacies are easy to access and form part of the fabric of local communities. Pharmacy teams regularly go the extra mile for patients, the public and the NHS (utilise local anecdotes*).
- The NHS spends £2bn per year on GP consultations for conditions which pharmacy teams could treat.
- 96% of the population can reach a pharmacy within 20 minutes by walking or using public transport.
- More than 1 billion prescription items are dispensed by community pharmacies every year.
- Pharmacies delivered more than 3.17 million medicines use reviews to help people to understand and take their medicines correctly in 2014/15.
- Community pharmacies help us to stay well and prevent unnecessary visit to the GP's surgery and A&E. For example, pharmacy services supporting frail elderly people after hospital discharge have reduced re-admittance by 63%.
- Community pharmacy can and should do much more. A community pharmacy minor ailments service could save the NHS £1bn per year through reduced GP appointments.

*It is useful to back these messages up with anecdotes about the value of pharmacy, eg:
It is important to maintain a network of health professionals on the high street willing to go the extra mile. This year in Tadcaster, for example, floods cut off half the town from their GP surgery, leaving vulnerable people isolated. The local pharmacy, on the other side of the river, offered up his consultation room, meaning everyone could access services.

The Government's plans threaten patient access to pharmacies and pharmacy services

- The Government wants some pharmacies to close. The Health Minister has suggested that up to 3,000 pharmacies – a quarter of pharmacies in England – could close under its plans.
- The Government says it wants a ‘clinically-focused’ community pharmacy service and to optimise the use of medicines. Community pharmacy is always open to discussions on changes that demonstrably support these objectives.
- The network underpinning the supply of medicines is complex and fragile. The Government has proposed a blanket cut in funding that will have unpredictable consequences. The Government has not yet confirmed the full extent of its planned cuts for future years.

The implications for patient care have not been properly considered and may be damaging

- The Government has not conducted an assessment of the impact of its proposals on patient safety, or on the quality of care, and it must commit to doing so. None of the detailed information required for a constructive discussion has been published.
- The Government must explain how proposed changes will deliver a clinically-focused community pharmacy service and optimise the use of medicines.
- There is strong evidence that pharmacy can relieve the considerable pressure on GP surgeries and A&E. The Government must demonstrate how changes will help to relieve those pressures.
- The Government must provide detail on how it will ensure access to pharmacy services in remote or deprived communities. Central funding for ‘Essential Pharmacies’ was ended in 2015.
- We do not yet understand the implications of hub and spoke dispensing models. It is too early to quantify any potential efficiency savings. Any changes designed to facilitate hub and spoke models must safeguard the quality, efficiency and accessibility of pharmacy services.
- GPs have expressed concerns about the plans – the NHS Alliance has called them ‘astonishing’ and ‘short sighted’.

Next steps

In any conversations it is important to offer a summary and some proposed next steps. The following points may be useful in any discussions LPCs or contractors have locally.

- The Government must provide more detail
- We must prevent disruption to patient care
- The Government must enter constructive discussions with community pharmacy

PSNC has this week published a set of service proposals that describe how pharmacy services could develop in the future within the context of Government drives for efficiency. We are currently awaiting feedback from the Department of Health and NHS England on these proposals, but in the meantime LPCs and pharmacy contractors may wish to raise these with relevant stakeholders to talk them through what we believe community pharmacy has to offer.

[Read a summary of PSNC's service development proposals.](#)

If you have queries on these key messages, or you require more information, please contact [Zoe Smeaton, Head of Communications and Public Affairs](#).