

UK COMMUNITY PHARMACIES: AN INDISPENSABLE HEALTH ASSET



Local pharmacies are a valuable part of the health system and play a significant role in keeping pressure off GPs and hospitals by providing a range of healthcare services such as urgent care, vaccinations, support with long-term conditions and treating common illnesses.

Community pharmacists are one of the most accessible healthcare professionals based at the heart of communities across the UK, particularly in deprived neighbourhoods, with the majority of the population visiting them each year. Pharmacies dispense over 1 billion prescription items each year as part of their core role, making it the biggest intervention in the healthcare system valued by the public.

The National Pharmacy Association believes there are huge opportunities for community pharmacy to deliver greatly

expanded services for patients. From 2026, all newly qualified pharmacists will be independent prescribers, which provides a great opportunity to commission prescribing-based clinical services for patients. The profession can do so much more, with the right investment, to tackle public health problems and take pressure off other parts of the health service. Investing in local pharmacies will help to cut GP waiting times and relieve pressure on hospitals and A&E departments. However, we cannot unleash our sector's potential without additional investment.

Building on the existing portfolio of services and the medicines supply function of pharmacies, there are some major opportunities to expand pharmacy services, encompassing **prevention, medicines optimisation, long-term medical conditions, and urgent care.**

PREVENTION

As health and wellbeing hubs, pharmacies already have a significant role to play in keeping people well, in addition to treating people when they are poorly. Properly supported we can do so much more.

Expanded Integrated Public Health Services

Expand the many already tried and tested existing and successful community pharmacy public health services to help make the health system a wellness generating, health-inequality reversing service, as well as an effective treatment service. Offer a nationally funded 'public health service bundle' for adoption across the pharmacy network. Community Pharmacy can substantially meet the challenge and aspiration of embedding the much-needed greater focus on prevention throughout the entire healthcare system.

Point of care testing/screening

Leverage the day-to-day high-volume touchpoint of the Community Pharmacy network to convert footfall and Make Every Contact Count. From screening for infections such as hepatitis and sexual health conditions to phlebotomy there is an opportunity to create screening services close to people's homes and free GP practices to deal with more complex referrals. Our core role in the nation's safe supply of medicines is the basis upon which community pharmacists can regularly review and manage long-term conditions and offer diagnostics and laboratory tests where appropriate to enable treatment decision-making.

Digital Health

The coming years will see many more patient health and care contact platforms and points of access go digital. Not all patient groups and demographics will be able to self-navigate this. Community pharmacies can act as the patient link to the health system, supporting people to manage their health online or in person.

Vaccine service expansion

Pharmacies have proven themselves in relation to providing vaccination services, such as flu and COVID vaccinations, and several other areas like hepatitis and travel health. The pharmacy network is an obvious place to start in growing our national vaccination services (including childhood vaccination schedules and national campaigns) across the UK, given its track record in public health and the unparalleled access it provides. Not only will vaccination services through community pharmacy be accessible to the wider population, but it will also build on pharmacists' abilities to boost delivery by providing advice and helping to combat vaccine hesitancy.

MEDICINES OPTIMISATION

As accessible medicines experts, community pharmacists should be the go-to healthcare professionals for optimising the use of medicines. The room for improvement across the UK health systems is considerable, in terms of patient safety, improved patient outcomes, post hospital discharge reconciliation and waste reduction.

Medicine reviews for all patients

The community pharmacy network has huge potential to reduce harm from medicines and achieve better value for health systems across the UK by tackling waste. All patients should have access to community pharmacy-based medicines optimisation reviews enabled by independent prescribing, to significantly improve outcomes and patient satisfaction.

The current lack of frontline and universal medicines optimisation means the opportunity has so far been missed to make a meaningful difference to care.

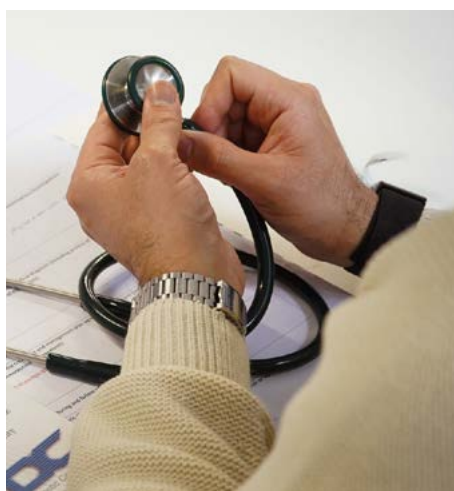
This mission would require community pharmacists not only have full access to patient records, but also the ability to request blood tests and other tests for specific clinical indicators – enabling the pharmacist to titrate any medication as required as well as identify any issues adversely affecting recovery and

management of long-term conditions.

Community pharmacists should also have the ability to directly refer patients if needed through appropriate healthcare pathways.

Local prescription management and deprescribing

With independent prescribing becoming increasingly common among pharmacists across the UK, and with appropriate governance safeguards in place, community pharmacists will have the ability to undertake a full prescription management role. If the Community Pharmacy and General Practice national contracts across the UK have the right and aligned incentives in place to support optimised deprescribing, the joint focus can move more to improving cost effectiveness and enhancing health outcomes. Community Pharmacy and General Practice IT systems need to be digitally compatible.



LONG-TERM MEDICAL CONDITIONS

We want to increase the management of conditions in pharmacy, such as obesity, asthma, COPD, cardiovascular disease including hypertension, and diabetes, closely integrating with General Practice.

Long-Term Condition Pathways

Cardiovascular Disease and hypertension case finding is already very active in community pharmacy in some parts of the UK. However, the opportunity exists to work towards a fully recognised prescribing role managing hypertension, diabetes, and other high prevalence long-term conditions, as part of integrated pathways of care.

Transfer of Care/Continuity of Care

Community pharmacy is well placed to enhance its contribution to the end-to-end support of patients undergoing an elective in-hospital treatment by contributing to their pre-admission preparation around medicines as well as post-discharge support. By building on our touch points we can give people a soft landing back into the community supporting those at greatest risk of medication related harm, reduce re-admissions and help address bed-occupancy.

Patient Management/Care Plans

The role of community pharmacy in care plans and defined/formally documented patient management is wide open to invention. Service pathway interventions could include the deployment of patient activation programmes, blood-test screening, treatment initiation in CVD to name but a few. Worthy, we believe, of a national dialogue in all 4 UK nations, leading to design and deployment.

Palliative Care

Community Pharmacists are crucial to care of people at end of life. Timely access to patient specific palliative care advice and medicines has been available from pharmacies for many years through locally commissioned community pharmacy services. We believe all patients at end of life must be able to access local pharmaceutical expertise via a funded health service.



URGENT CARE

Community pharmacy is perhaps the most accessible part of the health service, with many people living within walking distance to their nearest pharmacy. This means pharmacies are well placed to provide urgent care and to be a 'front door to the health system' should further support be needed.

Common clinical conditions schemes have been successful across the UK, where patients can access a range of treatments for minor illnesses without the need to see a GP. The treatments available for common conditions include earache, shingles, and uncomplicated urinary tract infections. These services are improving access to care and freeing up GP waiting lists.

There is a great opportunity to expand current services to enable patients to access even more advice and treatments without the need to see a GP. The scope will be much greater with more community pharmacists becoming independent prescribers across the UK.



WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

To truly unleash the potential of community pharmacies, we need to challenge the old ways of thinking and take this opportunity to redefine pharmacy's role in the health system.

Each Government across the UK needs to lead this transformative change, and the sector needs positive investment and support.

About the National Pharmacy Association (NPA)

The NPA is the trade body for independent community pharmacies in the UK. There are approximately 6,000 independent pharmacies and the vast majority are family-owned, small to medium-sized businesses. We count among our members large regional chains through to single-handed independent pharmacies. We also provide services to national multiple pharmacies. We are uniquely placed as the only community pharmacy body to represent pharmacies across all four nations.

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