

Briefing: Community pharmacies – Opposition day debate, 2 November 2016

Background

In October 2016, the Government announced its plans for reforming community pharmacy services. The Government had previously stalled these reforms in light of fears over the provision of services offered by community pharmacies.

Whilst the Government's plans for community pharmacy reforms present some challenges for these services, there are also opportunities to enhance the role of the pharmacist and off-set pressures in other parts of the NHS by encouraging patients to visit their pharmacy and not other parts of the health service. With the NHS facing unprecedented financial pressures, having to make £22 billion of efficiency savings before the end of the Parliament, these reforms offer an opportunity to reduce pressures on the NHS and drive increased usage of community pharmacies to make-up for reductions in establishment payments.

Ahead of the Opposition Day Debate on Wednesday 2 November, this briefing sets out the potential opportunities from the reform of pharmacy services in terms of promoting self care and reducing financial pressures on the NHS.

Recommendations for policy options to improve pharmacy reforms

PAGB and Pharmacy Voice believe that there are a number of ways in which these reforms could be improved to encourage the increased use of community pharmacies. Outlined below are six policy options which could help off-set the fall in income faced by pharmacies and alleviate pressures on the NHS by ensuring that community pharmacies are properly integrated into other health services.

- **National campaign to educate people about pharmacy.** Most people are not aware that pharmacists are qualified healthcare professionals and therefore visit the GP for advice instead. The Government through NHS England and Public Health England should partner, and match funding, with the pharmacy sector in a national public education campaign
- **Zero rate VAT on sales of all over-the-counter products.** Smoking cessation products all enjoy a reduced VAT rate of 5%. Following the UK's decision to leave the European Union, there is now an opportunity to reduce taxation on over-the-counter medicines. This could encourage people to self care, rather than visit the GP for a prescription, and increase usage of community pharmacies
- **Introduce a reclassification target to switch more medicines from prescription only status.** Increasing the range of medicines available to buy over-the-counter will increase convenience for people and reduce NHS costs for GP appointments and prescriptions
- **Ensure NHS 111 algorithms refer more callers appropriately to pharmacy** (work under way should be prioritised). An estimated 20% of GP appointments and 19% of visits to A&E are for self treatable conditions; yet only 1% of callers to NHS 111 are referred to a pharmacy. Improving the NHS 111 algorithms should reduce the number of people visiting the GP or A&E unnecessarily, and provide more and better options for appropriate care, while taking advantage of the extended evening and weekend hours of many pharmacies

- **Enable community pharmacy to refer people who need medical attention to the appropriate healthcare professional.** This would encourage people to visit a pharmacy first because they would know they would leave with either a medicine or advice to make them feel better, or a referral/appointment with another healthcare professional – fast-tracked if the pharmacist felt this was necessary
- **Enable community pharmacy to ‘write’ in patient records so that any medication and advice given can be recorded.** Most pharmacies can now access health records but they can’t record the advice/medication they give so people may still prefer to visit the GP for continuity of care. Enabling pharmacists to write to health records would mean that advice and treatment given in other health settings (GP, hospital) can take general health, underlying conditions and medicines use into account.

About PAGB

The Proprietary Association of Great Britain (PAGB) is the UK trade association which represents the manufacturers of branded over-the counter medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements.

About Pharmacy Voice

Pharmacy Voice is an association of trade bodies which brings together and speaks on behalf of community pharmacy contractors.

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