

Community Pharmacy Spotlight review

Health and Adult
Care Scrutiny

January 2023

Committee commissioned this review because of patients experiencing a disruption to the pharmacy services last summer in several parts of North and East Devon. There were unplanned closures, when collecting prescriptions, people experienced lengthy queues to be served and delays with repeat prescription being dispensed. Members were mindful that these may be part of wider issues effecting community pharmacy provision across Devon, which needed to be explored. The Committee understood the rural nature of the County presents a challenge to delivering health and care services particularly where exacerbated by staff shortages, but there was a need to examine where the gaps in provision are and explore measures to alleviate the problems.

Scope of the Review

- 1. To bring together stakeholders of, and representatives from, community pharmacy to explore and highlight the challenging issues that are impacting on peoples experience and interaction with community pharmacy, and ultimately their health and wellbeing.
- 2. To undertake this work to support the Devon Health and Care System and to ensure that the views of the communities it represents are heard.
- 3. To explore the challenges being faced by community pharmacy and the impact of behaviours within communities.
- 4. To understand where gaps in community pharmacy provision may be in the County and possible measures to address these. .

More than **58 million informal healthcare consultations are provided by pharmacists every year.**

A recent study showed Devon pharmacies provide an average of 19 per pharmacy per day. This is above the national average.

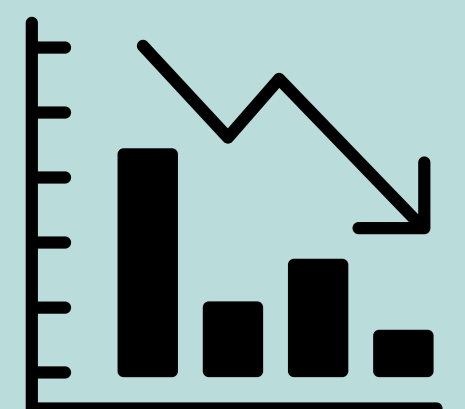


Informal consultations provided by pharmacists and their teams **save more than 24 million GP appointments every year.**



If the community pharmacy had not been there, **50% of patients reported they would have visited their GP, resulting in an additional 74 appointments in each GP practice each week in England.**

Real terms funding is reducing year on year as inflationary pressures are not taken into account in the current contract (2019 - 2024). Pharmacies are currently making significant efficiency savings (approximately 37% to 50%) in order to manage this funding squeeze; increase in demand for clinical services, the shrinking funding envelope, and general economic inflationary pressures.



- **91% of pharmacies are experiencing staff shortages**
- **Nine out of ten pharmacy teams have seen a significant increase in phone calls from patients about prescriptions, and 86% reported a rise in requests for healthcare advice**
- **82% said that increased workplace pressures are negatively affecting their mental health and wellbeing.**

How does Community Pharmacy work?

Community pharmacy makes up one of the four pillars of the primary care system in England, along with general practice, optical services and dentistry. It is arguably most well-known as a dispenser and retailer of medicines, but its role is in fact much broader and includes other NHS and publicly funded services.

The community pharmacy contractual framework with the NHS outlines three types of services:

- Essential services

These are the nationally set, mandatory services that community pharmacies must provide as part of their contract with the NHS if they are to operate providing NHS services. It includes the dispensing of medicines and medical appliances, the disposal of unwanted or spare medicines, advising patients on self-care, providing advice on healthy living and providing medicines support following a hospital discharge.



- Enhanced services

these are optional services such as anticoagulation services. In addition to these nationally determined services, community pharmacies can also be contracted to provide locally commissioned services – like enhanced services, these are commissioned by public bodies, including Public Health, Integrated Care System or local authorities, to meet the needs of particular local populations outside the nationally set and specified services. Examples of local commissioning from community pharmacies includes sexual health services, needle and syringe exchange services, or smoking cessation services.



- Advanced services

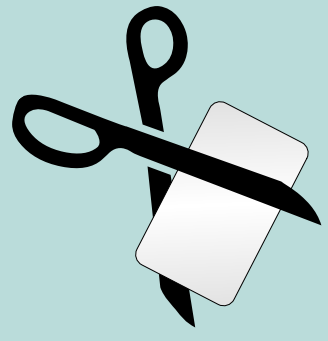
These are optional services that pharmacies can choose to provide. They are nationally set and specified, and the option to provide them is open to all community pharmacies, provided they meet certain minimum requirements. The advanced services currently commissioned through the contract framework include flu vaccination, the New Medicine Service (which aims to help patients understand and make best use of a newly prescribed medicine), and the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (which allows certain other parts of the health system to refer patients to community pharmacy for some urgent care needs like emergency medicines supply and as well as for some minor illness needs)



All pharmacies need a responsible pharmacist on site at all times to meet safety, legal and other requirements. Where this is not an owner, it must be another suitably qualified registered pharmacist.

Findings

Improving patient outcomes is essential. There is however a workforce crisis currently in community pharmacy. There have been worsening recruitment and retention issues due to a combination of community pharmacy role expansion along with difficulties relating to public perception and behaviours.



System Pressure

There has been a long-term attrition of 30% real term funding cuts over the past seven years which is leading to serious degradation of services to patients

Workforce

The community pharmacy sector is in the midst of a workforce crisis. The impact on staff in terms of stress and wellbeing through the pandemic was unrelenting. There were challenges already both in Devon and nationally prior to Covid -19 and the situation has worsened. Brexit was reported to have impacted workforce numbers and recruitment.



The Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework has placed a greater onus on community pharmacies offering a wider range of services such as blood pressure testing and weight management services.



91% of pharmacy business owners/head office representatives and 82% of pharmacy team members said their pharmacies were experiencing staff shortages, with 23% of owners/head office representatives reporting that their pharmacy had been required to close temporarily.

Communication with the public

In some parts of the County, community pharmacy staff have had to contend with increasing levels of abuse, threats and aggression due to disaffection about the quality and timeliness of service provision. There have been instances where security guards have had to be deployed in pharmacies and staff have had to wear body cameras.

There is a shortage of pharmacists and technicians (400-500) pharmacist deficit in the South West with a 14% vacancy rate in community pharmacy compared to a rate of 8% nationally).

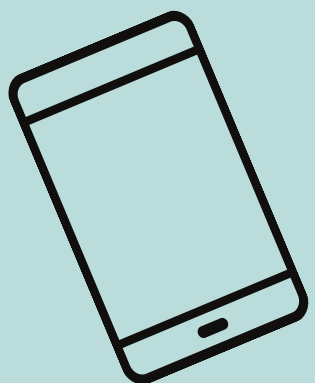


Repeat prescriptions

While it is clearly advantageous that prescriptions are now entirely electronic, members described numerous accounts from local residents reporting difficulties with ordering repeat prescriptions. A lack of IT skills was a barrier for some people being able to order repeat prescriptions online and care needs to be given to alternative approaches for those individuals to avoid them being marginalised.

Working with General Practice

Friction was reported at times between GP practices and pharmacies. Commissioning leaders needs to be clear what GPs are doing and what is the responsibility of community pharmacy.



Expanding use of the NHS App

It was evident that there is an issue where a GP advises that a prescription is ready to be collected and people turn at their pharmacy to find this not the case. . Members suggested using the NHS app to notify people when their prescription is ready, and it could be tailored to give updates in the way that parcel services do

Witnesses to the Task Group

The Spotlight Review took place virtually on 17th October 2022

There were fifteen witnesses from nine organisations. This included the local pharmaceutical committee, pharmacies in Devon, HealthWatch, regional and local NHS, as well as public health in Devon County Council.

Data collected included witness interviews and the use of secondary evidence.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

That a new Devon communication strategy and campaign is developed to improve public awareness and perception of community pharmacy, which signposts the appropriate pathway in terms of accessing community pharmacy, GP and acute care.

Recommendation 2

That commissioners work with the Practice Plus Group to improve both the level and the appropriateness of NHS 111 referrals to community pharmacy.

Recommendation 3

That all organisations work together to promote the establishment of a pharmacy school in the County to ensure that Devon and the far South West develops its own pharmacy technicians.

Recommendation 4

That long term investment is needed in training and progression opportunities for community pharmacy and across all areas of health and social care. That this includes use of bursaries, work experience and the delivery of regular health and social care careers days, which include a specific focus on community pharmacy.

Recommendation 5

That work is undertaken with NHS England and NHS Improvement to develop the NHS App to introduce notifications including SMS texts when a prescription is ready to be collected. Other alternative technologies should be encouraged to provide multi-choice IT interface routes for ordering repeat prescriptions.

Devon needs more pharmacists and pharmaceutical technicians working in the County to support the increase in demand with the population growth. The demographic profile of the County is a result of the expanding population with people living longer. Statistically a quarter of the population have long term conditions, and a further quarter of those aged over 60 have two or more medical conditions. So, demand will continue to grow. Community pharmacies play a vital role embedded in our localities and are a valued and frequently first port of call when we need health care advice or medicines.