

A summary of discussions in National Voices' roundtable on the future of community pharmacy on behalf of the National Pharmacy Association

On Wednesday 12 October 2022, National Voices convened a group of its members and lived experience partners on behalf of the National Pharmacy Association to discuss the future role of community pharmacy within primary care and more widely.

National Voices is the leading coalition of health and social care charities in England. We have more than 200 members covering a diverse range of health conditions and communities, connecting us with the experiences of millions of people. We work together to strengthen the voice of patients, service users, carers, their families and the voluntary organisations that work for them.

The National Pharmacy Association is the representative voice of independent community pharmacies across the UK and a leading provider of services to the entire sector.

National Voices members in attendance included Allergy UK, Asthma + Lung UK, Friends, Families and Travellers, Crohn's and Colitis UK, the Caribbean and African Health Network, Diabetes UK and Alzheimer's Society. In addition, there were three people in attendance who joined to share their lived experience. (The NPA held a separate conversation with Macmillan Cancer Support shortly after the roundtable, covering the same broad topics).

Attendees were asked to share their insights and expertise on the following questions:

- What do you hear from people living with ill health and disability about how they use community pharmacies?
- What do you like about community pharmacies?
- What do you see as the future role of community pharmacies?
- What do patients and service users think about new modes of service delivery within pharmacy?

The session began with a presentation from Nick Kaye, the NPA's vice chair, about his typical week in community pharmacy practice, and the potential for pharmacies to further develop their offer within the NHS, given the right level of sustained investment.

The NHS Plan states that NHS England will work with the Government to "make greater use of community pharmacists' skills and opportunities to engage with patients, while also exploring efficiencies".

Latest developments include the introduction of an oral contraception service from early 2023 and a community pharmacy cancer diagnosis pilot, to increase early detection rates and improve outcomes for patients.

This further reading covers the scope of Nick's remarks:

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- An In Pharmacy article by Dr Bruce Warner, Deputy Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for England on the future of community pharmacy. [View here](#).
- An In Pharmacy article, 'A can-do profession with a can-do vision for the future'. [View here](#).
- National Pharmacy Association, 'Our plan to unleash the potential of community pharmacy'. [View here](#).
- An In Pharmacy article by Helga Mangion, Policy Manager of the National Pharmacy Association on independent prescribing within community pharmacy. [View here](#).

What we heard from National Voices members

Many health and care charities see potential for community pharmacists to offer more services

- Pharmacies could be more fully deployed to provide community level care and support, including diagnostic tests and monitoring to help people manage their conditions. This could help to overcome issues with access to testing and support for some conditions.
- Representatives from Allergy UK highlighted that 1 in 3 people in the UK have an allergy and that 95% of people living with an allergy could receive care and support at community level, and community pharmacy is key in this.
- As another example, representatives from Crohn's and Colitis UK highlighted that the cost of home-use stool tests for Crohn's and Colitis are low, and that it would be far more convenient if people could access these tests at a local pharmacy rather than only via a GP. It was also highlighted that tests for inflammation can help identify when someone with Crohn's and Colitis is having a flare up and that it would be more convenient for patients to be able to access such tests at a pharmacy so they can proactively manage their condition and request any specialist help they might need.
- There was a favourable view of the potential of pharmacist independent prescribing, which can make pharmaceutical care far more convenient from the user perspective. One example considered was the prescribing of antibiotics to treat urinary tract infections. Another scenario presented for illustration was about a more complete solution to women with menopausal symptoms.

Continuity of care within pharmacy is vital to support people with long term conditions to manage their health

- Pharmacists are often able to build relationships with patients and familiarise themselves with someone's health needs, medication, and wider social environment. As a result, many pharmacists are able to provide personalised and continued care, and help patients better manage their conditions.
- We heard that continuity of care is particularly important for some groups of people, for example, people living with Alzheimer's as they can often be under polypharmacy

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and in sudden crises, such as delirium, pharmacies could be the first point of call. It is important that continuity of care is formalised and community pharmacies are a key part of PCNs (not just an “extended” part of the system).

Trust is key

- As pharmacists will often build relationships with their patients over an extended period of time, this can help to build trust and a friendly front door to the NHS. Community pharmacies can help break down barriers and help patients get earlier diagnosis or better manage their health conditions.
- This is especially helpful for people to feel comfortable discussing sensitive or otherwise taboo health problems. For example, representatives from Crohn’s and Colitis UK raised that approximately 20% of people experiencing symptoms of Crohn’s and Colitis would delay speaking to their GP.
- Building trusting relationships is very important within pharmacy. People living with ill health and disability are experts in their own health. It's important that pharmacists give people information on all the options available to them so they are enabled to make informed decisions about their own health. Pharmacies often have conversations with people that feel 'high stakes' for the individual and so open conversation and mutual respect is important.
- People are more likely to feel seen, heard, and taken seriously when they trust their community pharmacist. This can help foster genuine partnerships between healthcare providers and people and communities.

Pharmacies are well placed to deliver holistic care, rooted in communities

- Pharmacies are uniquely placed within the health and care system, as members of the public are usually able to access and get advice from a healthcare professional without having to book an appointment. The informality of a pharmacy environment can make it easier for people to access care and support.
- Community pharmacists are well placed to identify when individuals are struggling to access other forms of health and care, for example GPs, dentists or elective care. Pharmacists can use their clinical and health system knowledge to take on an advocate role for these individuals.

Pharmacies can take a ‘no wrong door’ approach in terms of access to care and information on health

- Across our membership, we often hear examples of barriers to care that some groups experience. For example, members of National Voices have previously highlighted that some people feel locked out of health and care when services are delivered solely through digital modes. As another example, representatives from FFT raised the issue of Romani and Traveller people often being wrongfully refused registration at GPs. We also regularly hear similar insights from members representing people experiencing homelessness. In some cases, pharmacists may become aware that individuals are having difficulties or experiencing barriers in

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wider health and care services. It was suggested that pharmacists can use their knowledge of the health system to ensure people are aware of their rights and to support patients to access the appropriate care and services. This would help to address health inequalities.

- For patients who have accessibility issues or simply can't wait on long, backlogged waiting lists for specialist care, it can feel really helpful to be able to walk into a pharmacy and get immediate support or advice on a health issue.

Any adoption of digital approaches to delivery in pharmacy should put patient choice at the centre

- In response to the National Pharmacy Association's description of emerging models of digital delivery in pharmacies, our members seemed open, but highlighted the need for patient choice around method of communication and access to be central. Access to face to face care remains important for many people.

Areas for improvement

- **Data:** Pharmacies could collect better data on the demographics of people accessing their services, which services they accessed, and what services they may need, to understand if there are communities their service aren't reaching and also to be able to provide more personalised and effective services.
- **Equitable services across England:** There were a number of initiatives which National Pharmacy Association shared information on which seemed positive and of benefit to patients. It is important that across the country we can have similar expectations about what pharmacies can offer and that initiatives that benefit people are not unfairly and unequally distributed across England.
- **Access:** People should be offered a choice of how they would like to access care and support. It is important that people feel seen, heard, and taken seriously.
- **Working with people and communities:** Pharmacies can and should take action to further embed patient voice in the design of their services and also to formally bring the insights they gather through their work into their wider Primary Care Network.
- **Training:** Pharmacies should tap into the knowledge and expertise voluntary and community sector organisations have in their work. For example, by undertaking training on specific topics – e.g. providing services for people living with specific conditions, or with specific communication or accessibility needs.
- **Holistic care:** People with health and care needs often have wider social and emotional needs. Pharmacies can partner with or co-locate with voluntary sector organisations, such as advice or debt organisations, to make this support more accessible and joined up.

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- **Advocacy:** Pharmacists are well placed to identify when individuals are struggling to access other forms of health and care, for example GPs, dentists or elective care. Pharmacists could use their clinical and health system knowledge to take on more of an advocate role for these individuals.