



24/03/20

Dear Colleagues

**RE: COVID-19 current issues relating to medication requests**

In light of the current COVID-19 outbreak the Consortium of Lancashire and Cumbria LMCs has been working closely with Community Pharmacy Lancashire and Community Pharmacy Cumbria to ensure robust business continuity plans are in place. In response to some Frequently Asked Questions:

- **How do patients access pharmacy services?**

Patients should be advised to contact the pharmacy by visiting their website, emailing or phoning them. Patients should not routinely be advised to visit the pharmacy to help reduce risk to themselves and to staff.

- **Should I change the prescription duration and the amount of medicines I prescribe?**

No, current repeat prescription quantities and duration **must remain the same as before**. This will ensure that community pharmacy can continue to manage stock levels in an already challenging environment. Likewise, it is important that patients do not order their repeats too early (up to a week in advance should be accepted at the GPs discretion) in order to maintain stock levels.

- **How can I improve the management of prescription requests?**

All patients and carers should be encouraged to register for Online Apps, such as Patient Access, to order their prescriptions online and nominate a Pharmacy. This will minimise the footfall in General Practice and in Community Pharmacy. Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) should be utilised. Electronic repeat dispensing can be used but practices should only do this if they have expertise in it otherwise there can be problems. It is better to use what you are currently doing and do it well than try to make big changes at this stage. Any prescriptions for patients who have been advised to self-isolate should be sent electronically to a pharmacy of the patients' choice and the patient advised to **contact** the pharmacy around collection of medication.

- **Can medicines be delivered by community pharmacy?**

Medication delivery is not an NHS service and is a private arrangement between the patient and their pharmacy. Please advise patients to contact the pharmacy directly and to ensure other options for the collection of medicines are considered, i.e. friends or relatives. The NHS is working closely with colleagues in the voluntary and social sector to see how volunteers can be mobilised in localities to provide support to pharmacies with making deliveries to vulnerable patients.

- **Should we still refer patients to community pharmacy for minor illnesses outside of COVID-19 symptoms?**

Yes, however, we need to be mindful that community pharmacy are currently experiencing similar pressures to other areas of the NHS. It would be prudent to advise patients and carers to **contact** their community pharmacy, see information on the pharmacy website, visit NHS Choices ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) or contact the pharmacy by phone or email in the first instance. This will help to ensure the latest guidance is followed for common ailments, prevent the spread of infection and minimise risk to patients, staff and the public as opposed to attending directly.

**Community Pharmacy being infected or staff shortages**

As most prescriptions are now sent to a pharmacy electronically, should a pharmacy need to close due to an infected patient presenting or due to staff shortages, most prescriptions will be at the nominated (closed) Pharmacy and inaccessible on the Pharmacies PMR system. Whilst all efforts are maintained to offer an uninterrupted service it may be necessary to return all EPS prescriptions to the spine. This may result in instances where GP practices may need to issue duplicate EPS Tokens which the patient or representative can take to an alternative Pharmacy. Once the Pharmacy re-opens the original nominations will need to be re-instated.

**Potential Closures due to GP Surgery being infected or staff shortages**

Business continuity plans may require surgery staff to work from alternative accommodation and thus any new prescription requests may not generate a prescription as the practice may not be able to process them. E.g. if a patient

drops the request for repeat medication directly through a letterbox at the surgery.

If there are repeat medicines ordering protocols that require patients to attend the practice, these may need to be reviewed to broaden the options to the patient. We would encourage patients to use online services if these are available. This will ensure patients continue to receive the same level of care.

Communications to other Parties on Closures

Any GP surgery or community pharmacy in need of closing are to inform NHSE&I of the closure.

GP surgeries and pharmacies are encouraged to inform each other in the event either needs to close or if there is restricted access. Both parties are encouraged to inform the LMC, LPC and the relevant CCG who can help establish contingency plans and facilitate local working.

GP practices or community pharmacies that are experiencing difficulties in delivering core services or reduced operational capacity should contact the LMC or the LPC in the first instance. Community pharmacies have also been instructed to inform the local area team. It is recognised that there may be reduced levels of service provided. If the pharmacy needs to be partially closed, EPS tokens may need to be taken to an alternative site.

Considering the current challenges and increased workload, it is imperative that we can maintain continuity of patient facing services and access to medicines and, therefore, we have outlined a series of recommendations below;

- We would urge that no new referrals for dossette boxes or monitored dosage systems (MDS) are made.
- In this instance we would encourage carers, family and friends to support patients with ordering online and administering medication if required.
- We would encourage GP practices and community pharmacies to share local intelligence and current issues which impact patient access to services.
- We also encourage GP practices and community pharmacies to promote the use of NHSmail to manage queries and requests and minimise face to face contact. Video conferencing is also a possible alternative.
- We also recommend that GP practices and community pharmacies arrange suitable times and locations to collect prescriptions if there is limited access to the practice.

Whilst pharmacies will make every effort to continue to supply existing patients with dossette boxes or MDS, it may be possible that we may need to revert to original pack dispensing with medicine administration charts to cope with the workload.

If anyone has any questions, then GP Practices should contact the LMC and Community Pharmacies should contact the LPC.

It is a trying time and it is important for us to work closely together to ensure patients continue to receive continued access to high quality healthcare in our local communities.

We greatly appreciate your support during these challenging times.

Regards



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