

OPPORTUNITIES FOR INNOVATION: DEVELOPING A LONG-TERM PLAN FOR PHARMACY

1. Introduction

As the NHS awaits details of its much-anticipated birthday funding settlement, progress is underway to develop a new long-term plan for the NHS that will drive further efficiencies and ensure that any new money is spent well. Whilst there has been much talk of new models of care, integrated care organisations, and sustainability and transformation partnerships in recent years, the community pharmacy sector has remained largely untouched by forward-thinking national reform.

The new NHS long-term plan offers the opportunity to modernise and upgrade the way pharmacy operates, maximising the adoption of digital solutions and new technology to transform the community pharmacy offer. Whilst the sector has seen significant constraints on its budget in recent years, pharmacies must now be better supported to embrace the new technology that will drive efficiencies and savings, streamline access to prescriptions, and invest in an enhanced clinical role for community pharmacists.

This briefing is intended to inform policymakers, parliamentarians and stakeholders with an interest in the NHS, new technology and community pharmacy. It sets out:

- An overview of the online pharmacy offer
- Opportunities to deliver efficiencies for the pharmacy sector
- Ways in which the role of clinical pharmacists can be enhanced
- Recommendations for the NHS long-term plan

If you have any questions about this briefing, or would be interested in meeting with Pharmacy2U to discuss the issues raised in further detail, please get in touch with: pharmacy2u@incisivehealth.com

2. The online pharmacy offer

Online pharmacies – such as Pharmacy2U – have the potential to transform the way pharmacy services work, for people accessing medicines, GP practices administering prescriptions, and pharmacies seeking to expand their clinical role. Online pharmacies can dispense prescriptions – and particularly repeat prescriptions - at scale, managing the process from GP through to the delivery of prescription medicines to people's front doors.



Whilst still regulated to the same high standards as High Street pharmacies, managing repeat prescriptions securely online means that people no longer have to take time out of their day to:

- Take their repeat prescription to their GP surgery
- Collect the prescription circa 24 hours later, which often has to be during working hours
- Wait in line at a High Street pharmacy to receive their medicines, if they are even in stock at that time

Through this process, people can have confidence that the medicines they need will be in stock, given the scale at which online pharmacies can dispense. Moreover, errors are reduced, through the automation of the early part of the dispensing process and multiple checks throughout, including barcode verification checks to ensure the right medicine is being correctly labelled.

Online pharmacies are also playing a growing role in supporting medicines adherence, which has been directly linked with improved clinical outcomes. There is evidence to show that regular pharmacist-led telephone interventions, in conjunction with online delivery of prescriptions, are effective at improving compliance with medication for patients with long-term conditions.ⁱ

3. Opportunities to deliver efficiencies for the pharmacy sector

There are significant financial savings to be gained from maximising the opportunity of online pharmacy. Pharmacy2U dispenses over 300,000 items per month, compared to the average 7,000 per High Street pharmacy. This means that, under the existing Pharmacy contract, they are remunerated at a rate **16% lower than the average High Street pharmacy** and **29% lower than High Street pharmacies with the highest costs** for dispensing prescriptions.

To date, estimated savings from online prescriptions stand at nearly £600 million.ⁱⁱ Based on the remuneration rates outlined above, Pharmacy2U estimates that upto £400 million could be saved each year: **this means potential total savings of upto £1.2 billion over the next three years.**ⁱⁱⁱ

These savings provide much-needed efficiencies within the already-squeezed pharmacy sector, which could potentially be reinvested in new and innovative services which support community pharmacies to enhance their clinical offer.

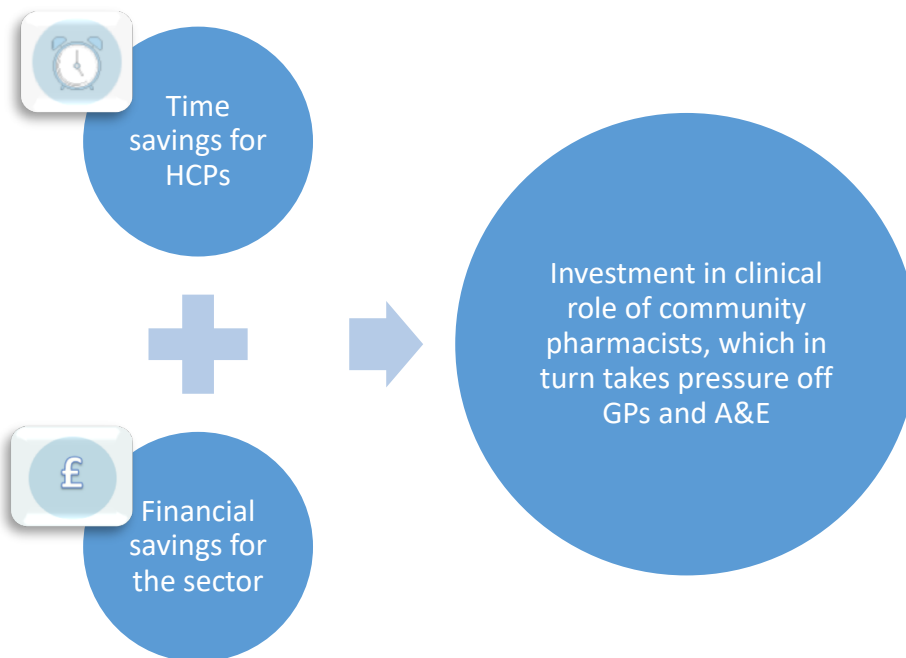
4. Ways in which the role of clinical pharmacists can be enhanced

The *Community Pharmacy Forward View*, developed by PSNC and Pharmacy Voice in 2016, set out ambitions to enhance and expand community pharmacies of the future as:^{iv}

1. The facilitator of personalised care for people with long-term conditions;
2. The trusted, convenient first port of call for episodic healthcare advice and treatment; and
3. The neighbourhood health and wellbeing hub

With online pharmacies taking on the time-consuming management of repeat prescriptions and medicines dispensing, valuable time would be freed up for High Street pharmacists to focus on such frontline patient care.

Pharmacists are highly-qualified clinical professionals, already providing enhanced services and advice for people's health and wellbeing. As mounting pressure rises on general practice and emergency departments, the role of the local pharmacist has never been more critical in the care pathway. With more people being actively directed to their local pharmacy as the first port of call for self care and advice,^v it is important that the way NHS pharmacies are funded fully reflects both this enhanced service offer and the advances in online pharmacy.



5. Recommendations for action

In order to realise the benefits of online pharmacy to the public, the pharmacy sector, and the wider NHS, Pharmacy2U is calling on policymakers to consider the following recommendations as part of the new long-term plan for the NHS:

- **Support awareness-raising of the benefits of online pharmacies.** A number of relatively small but impactful changes can be made to increase visibility and understanding of the offer of online pharmacy, including:
 - Featuring online pharmacy in national health promotion campaigns, such as the Stay Well campaign
 - Signposting patients to online pharmacies on NHS Choices
 - Taking steps to encourage GPs to inform patients of the full range of pharmacy choices
 - Driving forward the ambitions of the *General Practice Forward View* to support the integration of clinical pharmacy into primary care^{vi}

- **Review the reimbursement of pharmacies, to maximise the opportunity of online pharmacy and to support frontline care.** The current subsidies available to pharmacies on the High Street for dispensing medicines – which are higher than those available to online pharmacies – should be reduced and the money saved switched towards rewarding High Street pharmacists for offering frontline patient care rather than dispensing medicines
- **Eliminate variation between local NHS areas in the proportion of repeat prescriptions which are dispensed via online pharmacies.** National support should be offered to local NHS areas to make better use of online pharmacies, ensuring that there are no additional restrictions on people’s ability to order their medication through the online pharmacy of their choice. This would support the adoption of electronic prescribing and dispensing

About Pharmacy2U

Pharmacy2U is the UK’s first online pharmacy founded in 1999, providing dispensing services and access to online advice and support from healthcare professionals. Thanks to a constant focus on patients and by leveraging latest technology, it has grown to be the UK’s largest online pharmacy. Regulated by the General Pharmaceutical Council, Pharmacy2U is independent, founded and run by UK pharmacists.

If you have questions about this briefing or about Pharmacy2U more generally, please get in touch with Pharmacy2U@incisivehealth.com.

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ⁱ Lyons I, Barber N, Raynor DK, *et al*, The Medicines Advice Service Evaluation (MASE): a randomised controlled trial of a pharmacist-led telephone based intervention designed to improve medication adherence, *BMJ Qual Saf* Published Online First: 11 January 2016. doi: 10.1136/bmjqs-2015-004670

available here: <http://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/early/2016/01/11/bmjqs-2015-004670> (accessed June 2018)

ⁱⁱ Dr Duncan Petty, *Repeat Prescription Report*, November 2017, available here: <https://www.pharmacy2u.co.uk/prescription-report.html> (accessed February 2018)

ⁱⁱⁱ Based on average increase of 3% per year in the number of items dispensed by community pharmacy

^{iv} PSNC and Pharmacy Voice, *Community Pharmacy Forward View*, August 2016, available here: <http://psnc.org.uk/services-commissioning/community-pharmacy-forward-view/> (accessed May 2018)

^v NHS England, *Stay Well Pharmacy campaign*, available here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/commissioning/primary-care/pharmacy/stay-well-campaign/> (accessed May 2018)

^{vi} NHS England, *General Practice Forward View*, April 2016, available here: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/gp-fv.pdf> (accessed May 2018)