

Practice Payments

DH/PSNC statement on Dispensing Staff Levels Gateway Reference 5343

Information on Practice Payments is included in Part VIA of the Drug Tariff.

Pharmacies must complete the box on the FP34C submission form with details of dispensing staff. During the new contract transition period, all pharmacies will receive the Practice Payment related to the number of prescriptions that they have dispensed. From **1st October 2005**, if pharmacies have less than the minimum staffing levels, they will only receive the level of the Practice Payment for the number of items indicated by their actual level of staffing.

All staff involved in the dispensing process can be counted in the declaration of dispensing staff levels; this includes pharmacists, pharmacy technicians, dispensing/pharmacy assistants and medicines counter assistants. The 'dispensing process' includes:

- The taking in and issuing of prescriptions;
- Dispensing prescriptions;
- Clinical assessment of prescriptions and accuracy check of dispensed items;
- Stock ordering and putting stock away;
- Preparation and assembly of medicinal products;
- Resolving queries related to prescriptions;
- Counselling patients on their prescriptions, and;
- Carrying out the administration necessary for the payment of prescriptions (e.g. endorsing and filing prescriptions);

Where a staff member has multiple roles (for example, a medicines counter assistant who spends 50% of their time taking in prescriptions and helping patients complete the exemption declaration and 50% of their time undertaking general tasks on the retail side of the pharmacy business), only the number of hours spent supporting the dispensing process may be counted in the staffing declaration.

The pharmacy in completing the box must record the staff levels. In the particular weeks covered by the declaration, a member of staff may have been absent for example on annual leave, or a period of sickness absence. In these circumstances the staff member may still be included in the declaration, as this is a record of the normal staffing levels for the pharmacy. If a member of staff leaves and the pharmacy is actively engaged in arranging a replacement for the post, that post may similarly be included in the declaration. However PCTs when monitoring staffing levels will need to be satisfied that the levels declared do reflect the normal staffing levels of the pharmacy, and if a staff member is not replaced for a prolonged period the PCT may decline to accept that post as counting toward the pharmacy's staffing level. The PCT may wish to look at payroll and other evidence of employment if it has concerns about the validity of the declaration.

From 1st October 2005, at the end of the transition period, the PPA will start to take into account staffing levels declared on the FP34C in

calculating the Practice Payment made. PCTs will monitor compliance with these requirements, as with other aspects of the new contract's Essential Services.

PSNC and the Department of Health recognise the confusion that rounding to the nearest full-time equivalent staff member has caused in practice. In light of this, we have agreed to change the way that the declaration is made. From October 2005, pharmacies should declare the total number of hours that staff members supporting the dispensing process work in an average week. The total number of hours declared on Form FP34C should be rounded to the nearest whole number. If the number is 0.5 hours or less, round down and if the number is more than 0.5 hours, round up. If the number of dispensing staff hours per week, based on establishment, alters in the course of the month for which the declaration is being made, for example because a brand new post is established, the lowest number should be declared. The declaration should include **all** staff members involved in the dispensing process, including the pharmacist. The Drug Tariff and FP34C form will be amended to reflect this.

How the Drug Tariff will look

Number of items per month	Minimum Dispensing Staff (number of hours per week) *
2,000 – 3,499	40
3,500 – 4,999	56
5,000 – 6,499	75
6,500 – 7,999	94
8,000 – 9,499	112
9,500 – 10,999	131
11,000**	150

*Dispensing staff include: a pharmacist; a non-practising pharmacist working as a dispenser, a pre-registration trainee (only half of the pre-registration trainees hours should be counted for this purpose) or an assistant in the dispensary trained to undertake the functions being performed.

**Pharmacy contractors will be required to employ a staff member for an extra 19 hours for each additional 1,500 items the pharmacy contractor dispensed per month above 11,000 items.

Frequently Asked Questions

I employ a delivery driver to deliver prescriptions to patient's homes. Can I count him/her in my staffing declaration?

No, delivering medicines to a patient's home is not considered part of the dispensing process. Therefore, a delivery driver who is solely employed for this purpose should not be counted as part of the declaration. If only part of the employee's job is delivering prescriptions and they are supporting the dispensing process at other times, the proportion of the employee's job that is spent supporting the dispensing process can be counted.

My spouse helps me out in the pharmacy regularly but is not on my payroll. Can I count him/her in my staffing levels?

If your spouse is not on the payroll and has no job description, your PCT may not accept him/her as part of your staff. The PCT may also have

concerns about you meeting some of the new contract's Clinical Governance requirements if a staff member does not have a contract of employment.

Two of my dispensing staff start work at 7am dispensing repeat prescriptions and putting stock away before the shop opens at 9am. Can I count the hours that they work when the pharmacy is closed?

Yes as they are supporting the dispensing process.

I have a staff member who works from 4pm – 5.30pm each evening and whose main responsibility is to put away stock in the dispensary and refill our drawers of bottles and other dispensing containers. Can I count them?

Yes, both of these tasks are supporting the dispensing process so you can count this employee when making your declaration.

I have just employed a new dispensing assistant but they have not yet achieved the RPSGB's minimum competency requirements. Can I count them towards the staffing levels?

Yes, for the purposes of the staffing declaration, you can count any staff member who is supporting the dispensing process and who has been trained to undertake the functions that are being performed by them. It is not necessary for the purposes of the staffing declaration for the staff member to have obtained a recognised qualification or certificate.

The RPSGB has a number of requirements around the training for support staff. Information on their requirements is available on the RPSGB Website (www.rpsgb.org).

My dispenser left my employment, I am advertising for someone to fill the position.

If a member of staff leaves and the pharmacy is actively engaged in arranging a replacement for the post, that post may be included in the declaration. However when PCTs monitor staffing levels they will need to be satisfied that the levels declared do reflect the normal staffing levels of the pharmacy. If a staff member is not replaced for a prolonged period the PCT may decline to accept that post as counting toward the establishment level.

My dispenser took 2 weeks holiday this month; can I still count the hours?

Yes, a staff member's contracted number of hours can still be counted when the staff member is absent for short periods of time, for example, when on holidays.

My dispenser is currently on sick leave, can I count him/her in my staffing levels?

Yes, your staff member can be counted if they have only been absent for a short period or if they have been absent long term but are receiving statutory sick pay.

I regularly employ locum pharmacists and locum pharmacy technicians. Can I count them in the declaration?

Yes, if you regularly employ locum staff to support the dispensing process, the total number of hours that locum staff are employed in a typical week can be included in the staffing declaration.