

NHS Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework Enhanced Service – Sharps disposal

Background

The storage, carriage, processing and supply of waste are all subject to stringent controls designed to minimise the negative effects of waste on the environment. All community pharmacies provide patients with a service to dispose of unwanted medicines as part of the contractual framework's Essential services; this service does not however cover the disposal of sharps generated by patients who use lancets for blood testing, or needles and syringes for the administration of parenteral medicines.

It is important for sharps to be disposed of safely, as inappropriate disposal methods create a risk of accidental needle-stick injuries to pharmacy staff, waste management operatives and other members of the public, potentially leading to infection with blood-borne diseases.

Local authorities are obliged to collect clinical waste from householders on request, but under section 45(3)(b) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 they may make a reasonable charge for this service.

1. Service description

- 1.1 Pharmacies will distribute sharps bins to patients who are prescribed medicines which require parenteral administration or appliances for point of care testing, which consequently result in the production of sharps.
- 1.2 Pharmacies will subsequently provide a disposal service for these patient generated sharps in order to facilitate its safe disposal. Patients will return filled and sealed sharps bins to the pharmacy.
- 1.3 A licensed waste management contractor will be commissioned by the PCO to remove the filled and sealed sharps bins from the pharmacy and arrange their safe disposal.

2. Aims and intended service outcomes

- 2.1 To provide patients with a safe and convenient route for the disposal of sharps.
- 2.2 To reduce the volume of sharps stored in patients' homes, by providing a convenient route for disposal, thus reducing the risk of accidental needle-stick injuries.
- 2.3 To reduce the environmental damage caused by the use of inappropriate disposal methods for sharps.
- 2.4 To improve the health of local communities by preventing the spread of blood-borne infections by ensuring the safe disposal of sharps.
- 2.5 To provide an alternative to local authority collection schemes, particularly where these are either not available, or a charge deters use.

3. Service outline

- 3.1 Pharmacies will issue sharps containers (supplied by the PCO) to patients receiving prescriptions for parenteral, self-administered medication and appliances for point of care testing. Pharmacy staff will explain to patients the importance of using a safe disposal method for sharps, the operation of the service and the safe use of the sharps box.
- 3.2 Patients will return filled and sealed sharps bins to the pharmacy, where they will be placed in a UN type container provided by the PCO commissioned waste disposal contractor.¹
- 3.3 The pharmacy will allocate a safe place to store equipment and the UN type storage containers provided by the waste disposal contractor.
- 3.4 The frequency of waste collection by the PCO waste disposal contractor should be agreed to ensure there is not an unacceptable build up of sharps on the pharmacy premises.

¹ Should pharmacies be required to collect full sharps containers from patients' homes, then the pharmacy company (rather than the individual pharmacy) will need to be registered as a waste carrier.

Pharmacy contractors should be able to request additional waste collections if there is an unexpected rise in patient returns.

- 3.5 The pharmacy contractor has a duty to ensure that pharmacists and staff involved in the provision of the service have relevant knowledge and are appropriately trained in the operation of the service, including sensitive, client-centred communication skills. This may be facilitated by the provision of local training by the PCO.
- 3.6 Whilst maintaining the confidentiality of service users, the pharmacy will maintain adequate records of sharps bins supplied, sharps bins returned, and sharps bins consigned for disposal. As it will not be possible to assess the risk of infection from the sharps, all returned sharps will be consigned as hazardous waste.
- 3.7 Community pharmacies will comply with all relevant waste management legislation, including both Hazardous waste consignment notes and consignee returns to the producer where required.
- 3.8 The pharmacy contractor will have a standard operating procedure in place for this service. The pharmacy contractor has a duty to ensure that pharmacists and staff involved in the provision of the service are aware of and operate within national and locally agreed protocols.
- 3.9 The pharmacy contractor will nominate a named individual to act as the lead for the service, who will oversee compliance with health and safety and environmental legislation.
- 3.5 The pharmacy contractor should ensure that their staff are made aware of the risk associated with the handling of returned used equipment and the correct procedures used to minimise those risks. A needle stick injury procedure should be in place.
- 3.6 The pharmacy contractor should maintain appropriate records to ensure effective ongoing service delivery and audit.
- 3.7 Appropriate protective equipment, including gloves, overalls and materials to deal with spillages, should be readily available close to the storage site.
- 3.8 Staff involved in the delivery of this service should be offered immunisation for Hepatitis B and uptake should be recorded.
- 3.9 The PCO will provide a framework for the recording of relevant service information for the purposes of audit and the claiming of payment.

4. Quality Indicators

- 4.1 The pharmacy reviews its standard operating procedures and the referral pathways for the service on an annual basis.
- 4.2 The pharmacy participates in an annual PCO organised audit of service provision.
- 4.3 The pharmacy co-operates with any locally agreed PCO-led assessment of service user experience.