



Briefing 024/16B: Patient choice and IT - Escalation routes

Community pharmacies sometimes encounter situations where a patient's choice of pharmacy is being limited – for example, when an app or digital service redirects Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) prescriptions or NHS services without clear permission.

Protecting patient choice is a core NHS duty for all people working within health and care.

This briefing explains how patients, pharmacy teams, and LPCs can raise concerns, what information NHS England needs.

1. When patients want to make a complaint

Patients have the right to choose which pharmacy they use for NHS prescriptions and services. If a patient believes their choice is being restricted such as:

- being steered towards a particular pharmacy;
- an app auto-routing prescriptions without clear consent; or
- any form of pressure or suggestion that limits their options.

They can contact their [local NHS team \(ICB\)](#) to make a complaint. Local NHS contact information can be found via NHS regional webpages.

Complaints can be submitted anonymously or directly, and patients can request that their GP practice not be informed. Patients may also decide whether to cc other relevant parties into their complaint, such as their preferred pharmacy.

2. How pharmacy teams or LPCs can raise concerns

Pharmacy teams and LPCs can raise concerns directly with their Integrated Care Board (ICB).

To help the ICB assess the issue quickly, please set out the concern in writing with clear and structured information.

a. Which organisation(s) were involved

- include ODS codes where known; and
- specify whether the organisation is a pharmacy, app, website, or service provider.

b. What the impact was

Describe the practical and clinical impacts on:

- your pharmacy (e.g. diverted prescriptions, reduced EPS nominations);
- your patients (e.g. confusion, complaints, delays); or
- your local area (e.g. widespread redirection patterns).

c. Any evidence you can provide

Useful examples include:

- activity data or statistics;
- relevant EPS information;
- patient comments or written feedback;
- screenshots or messages from apps or services; and/or a
- timeline of events.

d. A proposal on how the issue might be resolved (optional)

Queries may additionally be directed from pharmacy teams and LPCs directly towards technology providers for digital choice-related issues, who will sometimes be able to adjust or resolve the issue.

3. How ICBs and the NHS progress issues

ICBs may escalate issues to the central NHS England pharmacy team.

Where a concern relates to an NHS IT system, EPS behaviour, or a technical supplier the ICB or the NHS England pharmacy team might contact as needed:

- A system provider for clarification.
- Specialist NHS digital teams (e.g. the NHS EPS team and the NHS GP ITG team), if the matter is technical or system-level.

These NHS digital teams may do other joint work directly with many of the IT providers.

4. Sharing updates with Community Pharmacy England's IT team for its information

LPCs may share email threads or summaries sent to ICBs or IT providers with Community Pharmacy England's **IT lead** for its information. Whilst we do not contract with the technology companies, and the regulation of technology companies is outside of our role, this intelligence strengthens our ability to influence and improve pharmacy arrangements and IT nationally. We may be able to support parties with the patient choice IT escalation if it has not yet been raised or they are not aware of this route.

5. What this supports

This escalation route aligns with:

- **NHS patient choice duties;**
- **Community Pharmacy IT Group (CP ITG) principles**, including digital inclusion, user-centred design and burden reduction;
- **NHS Fit for the Future** ambitions around fair access and trusted digital services;
- **Equitable, interoperable pharmacy IT:** The sector's long-term vision.

Read more:

- Our [Patient choice and IT](#) webpage
- Our associated [Briefing O24/16A: Escalating NHS IT service issues](#)