

# Briefing: 036/23: Briefing for pharmacy teams – the Hypertension Case-Finding Service

This Community Pharmacy England Briefing provides information for pharmacy teams on the Hypertension Case-Finding Service (known as the NHS Blood Pressure Check Service in patient-facing communications).

## Background

- Cardiovascular disease (CVD) is one of the leading causes of premature death in England;
- Hypertension (high blood pressure) is the biggest risk factor for CVD and is one of the top five risk factors for all premature death and disability in England; and
- There are an estimated 5.5 million people who have undiagnosed hypertension across the country.



Early detection of hypertension is vital, and this pharmacy service will help do that, including by targeting people who do not routinely see their GP or use other NHS services. This could help improve patient outcomes and reduce the burden on GP practices.



## Aims of the service

The service aims to:

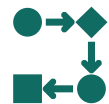
- Identify people aged 40 years or older with high blood pressure who have previously not had a confirmed diagnosis of hypertension. At the discretion of pharmacy staff, people under the age of 40 may also be included in the service.
- Where the person's blood pressure is high, they will be referred to their general practice to confirm diagnosis and for appropriate management.



- At the request of a general practice, undertake ad hoc normal and ambulatory blood pressure measurements.
- Provide another opportunity to promote healthy behaviours to patients.

### Brief overview of the service

- This is a free NHS service which will be provided in the consultation room.
- The service has two stages:
  - **Stage 1** – Identifying people at risk of hypertension and offering them the opportunity to have their blood pressure measured (referred to as a ‘clinic check’).
  - **Stage 2** – This is offered if a person’s blood pressure reading is high at Stage 1. A person will be offered ambulatory blood pressure monitoring (ABPM), which uses a specialist blood pressure monitor to measure a patient’s average blood pressure through the day. Patients who are then identified with high or very high blood pressure will be referred to their general practice for additional care.
- A patient’s GP practice will be notified of the blood pressure reading; the timescale for sending the notification to the practice will depend on the reading, with some notifications being sent weekly, while others are sent on the same day the monitoring occurs.
- Pharmacy owners must have a standard operating procedure (SOP) in place for this service and all pharmacy staff involved in the provision of the service must be familiar with and adhere to the SOP.



The service will work alongside general practice who may refer patients for blood pressure checks where those individuals have already been diagnosed with hypertension or who need ABPM.

### What role can I play in the service?

The whole pharmacy team can be involved in promoting this service and can recruit patients to the service. When a suitable person is identified, appropriately trained pharmacy staff will need to confirm eligibility and obtain the patient’s consent to have their BP measured. Measuring a patient’s blood pressure must also be carried out by appropriately trained pharmacy staff.





## Top tips for providing the Hypertension Case-Finding Service

The below tips have been provided by pharmacy teams providing other nationally commissioned Advanced Services and also those involved in the pilot of the Hypertension Case-Finding Service.

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### Challenge 1: My patients say they don't want the service

Patients may be reluctant to receive services for a variety of reasons, including lack of time or feeling that they don't need help beyond that given by their GP. Try some of the following:

- **Don't force it:** If patients say they don't have time for the service, don't treat this as a problem and instead give the patients a leaflet to take away and suggest they might like to come in another time.
- **Go beyond the GP:** Some patients feel they can ask GPs for any advice needed, so explaining how the service supports GPs' work can help.
- **Think about your terminology:** Patients may be more receptive to the offer of "checking your blood pressure and having a chat about it" but may be put off by words like 'service' and 'review'. Emphasising that services are free NHS services can also help.
- **People are busy:** People may not be interested in receiving a service if it's going to take a long time, so consider using phrases like "It will only take 10 minutes" or "Since you're waiting for your prescription, why not have your blood pressure checked while we get your medicines ready for you".
- **Sell the benefits:** Emphasise the potential benefit of the service and sharing your own experience to demonstrate, for example, if you or other members of staff have had your blood pressure measured, can help.



### Challenge 2: I'm not sure how to promote the service



- **Use the available promotional materials:** To promote the availability of the service to patients, a poster (for pharmacy owners to print) and digital marketing resources are available to pharmacy owners in the resources section at [cpe.org.uk/hypertension](https://cpe.org.uk/hypertension).

- **Creating your own promotional materials:** Remember if you decide to develop your own marketing materials, they must comply with the requirements of the [Terms of Service](#) relating to the promotion of services funded by the NHS.
- **Using the NHS identity:** If you decide to develop your own marketing materials and want to use the NHS identity, ensure the [guidelines on the use of the NHS identity](#) are adhered to.
- **Word of mouth:** When you have measured someone's blood pressure, ask them to tell their friends and family to come into the pharmacy and get their blood pressure measured too – word of mouth is a great way to promote the service.
- **Use technology:** Do you use a text messaging service in your pharmacy? Does your pharmacy have any social media accounts? If so, you could highlight the free service and include a link to, for example, the British Heart Foundation website, which explains the importance of knowing your blood pressure.
- **Advertising slips:** These can be attached to prescription bags to prompt a conversation to promote the service when handing out medicines; these are available at [cpe.org.uk/hypertension](http://cpe.org.uk/hypertension).
- **Highlight the service to patients already accessing other services at the pharmacy:** For example, the New Medicine Service, Flu Vaccination Service, Pharmacy First service, self-care and healthy living advice.
- **Highlight the service to patients who are in the pharmacy for other reasons:** For example, buying over the counter medicines or looking at other health and beauty products.
- **Other pharmacy services you could promote:** Think about what other services you provide at your pharmacy and could link into this service:
  - Could you check if the patient is eligible for a free NHS flu vaccination or would like to get a private flu vaccination?
  - Do you have any locally commissioned services that you are providing such as a Stop Smoking service that the patient may be interested in?






### Challenge 3: I'm too busy to stand at the counter looking for patients!


- **Use your team:** Only appropriately trained and competent pharmacy staff can provide blood pressure checks under this service, but you can use your whole team to promote the service, help to identify eligible patients, recruit them, and potentially book appointments (if you are using a booking system in your pharmacy). 
- **Make the most of your PMR system:** The PMR will provide you with details such as a patient's age and the medicines they are taking, so this may assist you with targeting people eligible to use the service.
- **Organise training:** Brief training for staff is likely to be valuable to ensure they all understand and feel confident talking about how the service works and how they can be involved in the service. 

### Challenge 4: How can I reach patients who don't collect their own medicines?

- **Take-home materials:** As with patients who collect their medicines but are too busy to stay or make an appointment, giving the patient's carer or family member a brief description of the service and then adding a letter or information leaflet to the bag can help.
- **Be flexible:** Consider offering appointments and walk-in appointments to offer the most flexibility to your patients.
- **Involve the carer:** It is worth explaining the service to a patient's carer and advising that they could accompany the patient to have their blood pressure measured if it is the patient's wish. 
- **Consider the carer:** A carer is often critical to the patient's continued wellbeing. Where appropriate, offer a blood pressure check to a carer to help them consider their own health. A carer who has experienced the service can be an advocate of the service to the patient.



## Challenge 5: How can I balance unpredictable workloads with appointments?

- **Plan your days:** Try to book appointments for times when the pharmacy tends to be less busy, or when you have more appropriately trained and competent pharmacy staff working who can offer the service. This may well be something you do already, but it can help. Pharmacies vary but many pharmacy owners find that before 11am is the quietest, and that patients collecting prescriptions at this time are more willing to wait; others avoid booking appointments over the 'lunch rush' when people collect prescriptions during their lunch break.  

- **Talk to patients:** If a patient books in for an appointment, explain that you will do your best to see them on time but that occasionally you will have to deal with an urgent request from another patient which could cause a brief delay; this will help manage a patient's expectations.
- **Be clear on timing:** Patients must not feel rushed, and they need time to ask any questions they have about the service, but there are steps you can take to ensure that consultations are not inappropriately long. Try managing expectations by setting out an approximate or maximum timeframe at the beginning, e.g. "This shouldn't take longer than fifteen minutes"; use 'closing signals' such as standing up to indicate that the appointment is coming to an end; and make sure staff know what sort of urgent circumstances they should limit interruptions to.

## Challenge 6: My patients forget appointments and don't turn up!

If you decide to use a booking system, it can be frustrating if patients don't turn up for their appointments. Try some of the following:

- **Remind them:** Giving patients an appointment card or other written reminder of their planned appointment can be helpful, as can reading back times and details if it is being booked on the phone. You could also consider phoning patients the day before their appointment to confirm they are still able to attend.
- **Embrace technology:** If patients have booked an appointment, you could remind them about this beforehand with an email or even a text message.



- **Talk to them:** Let them know that it's ok if they need to cancel or change their appointment, but that you'd really appreciate it if they could let you know if they are not able to attend the appointment as you may then be able to offer this appointment to someone else.

### Challenge 7: My local GPs just aren't interested in the service



GPs can be difficult to win over when it comes to pharmacy services, sometimes because they're under too much pressure to be interested, and sometimes because they don't see the value. Keep these facts in mind in any dealings with them and try the following:

- **Think about the team:** There is more to a GP practice than just the doctors and some pharmacies have successfully promoted other services by talking to practice nurses, clinical pharmacists, practice managers and others; you could even give them leaflets to hand out about the service.
- **Work together:** In many cases, there will be several pharmacies seeing patients from any practice so, talk to one another – a joint approach could be far more successful and will save the GPs time.
- **Value their time:** We know that GPs are busy and feel under pressure, so try to find a time that will suit them to talk about the service rather than dropping it on them in the middle of surgery hours. You could ask for a short speaking slot at a practice meeting, for example.
- **Don't undersell yourself:** It can feel uncomfortable telling people about how well you have done, but if you don't convince GPs about the value of services, they'll never buy into them. Try telling them some of your success stories where patients have seen a significant benefit from services.
- **Keep track of your joint successes with this service:** How many patients have been identified and how many are now receiving treatment because of the joint work between your pharmacy and the practice?
- **Be concise:** Appropriate feedback and referral back to GP practices can help cement the benefits of services in their minds, so keep feedback concise and limit it to issues that will be of value or interest to them.



- **Ask their opinions:** GPs are more likely to accept something if they have had some say over it, so ask your GPs for feedback on the service. You could also ask them if they have any patient groups you could target to help them in their work.
- **Keep up the momentum:** If referrals from a practice are low, or start to dwindle, speak to them again – sometimes occasional reinforcement is all that's needed to keep referrals routine.
- **Train together:** Consider holding shared training with practice staff – this can improve both your relationships and patient care.

Further information on the Hypertension Case-Finding Service can be found at [cpe.org.uk/hypertension](https://cpe.org.uk/hypertension).

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**If you have any queries or require more information, please contact:**

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