

Patient choice of pharmacy for clinical NHS pharmaceutical services

Key information

1. Community Pharmacy England and the British Medical Association already publish joint guidance on the direction of prescriptions. This states that:

Patients have a free choice between any community pharmacy and in certain instances can access a GP's dispensary.

Actions by practices that influence a patient's choice of pharmacy can undermine relationships with patients and damage trust and cooperation between healthcare professionals. Financial arrangements between community pharmacies and GP practices should be transparent.

And includes, for example:

What to avoid when directing to pharmacies

- *Providing a practice endorsement for a pharmacy.*
- *Allowing a practice database to be used to facilitate the promotion of a pharmacy, or any other promotional activity.*
- *Suggesting that the practice, GP or member of staff would like a patient to use a particular pharmacy.*
- *Allowing a patient to believe that the level of care they receive from their medical practice could be influenced by their choice of pharmacy...*
- *Failing to be equitable when liaising with pharmacies, by offering differing levels of cooperation*

- *Ignoring a patient's freely stated choice of pharmacy...*
- *Failing to be transparent about a financial relationship between a practice and a pharmacy.*
- *Any other practice, which is designed to unduly influence a patient's choice of pharmacy.*

2. Similar principles apply to other clinical NHS pharmaceutical services, including Pharmacy First.
3. A key principle of the NHS is the patient's right to choose where they access an NHS service.
4. Community Pharmacy England considers that patient choice of pharmacy is essential for prescriptions and other clinical pharmacy services, including Pharmacy First. This is particularly so where patients are signposted or referred to NHS pharmaceutical services by NHS GP practices.
5. Patients should be able to choose the pharmacy they go to (which may be a physical pharmacy or a remote pharmacy), and agree to the transfer of any personal information to that pharmacy.
6. The geographical location of the pharmacy selected should be clear to the patient before a choice is made, and any patient safety issues relating to the supply of medicines should be explained to the patient. For example, where pharmacy clinical services are provided remotely and medicines may be sold or supplied as part of the clinical service, there may be a delay in the patient receiving those medicines. A patient who has an urgent need for a medicine may need to be referred to a nearby pharmacy premises from which they can collect the medicine.
7. Pharmacies must comply with the NHS (Pharmaceutical and Local Pharmaceutical Services) Regulations 2013 on inducements, even when using third-party apps. For example, a pharmacy must not give, or promise, any person (including a patient) any gift or reward as an inducement to dispense their prescription, or for the nomination of the

pharmacy for dispensing prescriptions, or to receive any other clinical pharmacy service such as Pharmacy First.

8. Where a GP practice (e.g. on the practice website) provides access or a link (directly or indirectly) to a number of pharmacies (which may be linked through a third-party app), for the remote provision of clinical pharmacy services (e.g. Pharmacy First), it is suggested that patients should be informed in clear, obvious terms, in real-time, and at the same time and on the same GP practice webpage that/of:

- They may access or receive the clinical service in person from a nearby pharmacy premises.
- They can go to any pharmacy of their choice that provides the service, including any remote pharmacy.
- Any potential patient safety issues, for example, the likely delivery time of medicines if they are needed.
- The basis on which specific pharmacies are linked with the GP practice (e.g., the GP practice links to an app that only promotes those pharmacies signed up to that app).
- Any personal information (such as name, address, email, or telephone number) a patient provides to subsequent third-parties/websites is not being provided to the GP practice and may be provided to a remote or local pharmacy (third-parties should tell patients how their personal information will be used, before they ask patients to enter it on the relevant website/before patients give it to them).