



Dear Colleagues

Pharmacy's response to the Coronavirus

I want personally to thank you for your commitment to patients, the public and the NHS in these difficult times. I want you to know that all the Health Ministers are incredibly grateful for all of the work you are doing. We are living through unprecedented times and I recognise that pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and their teams across the country are providing an outstanding response to patients in challenging circumstances.

The Government as a whole recognises that community pharmacy teams are on the frontline in providing medicines and health advice to many people. We also recognise the immense contribution being made by pharmacists in hospitals, GP surgeries and Clinical Commissioning Groups, your work is critical to the safe care of patients.

Like most people I visit and talk to pharmacists regularly, meaning that I hear from you directly about how challenging the situation you face truly is. I know that you are all working incredibly hard to keep your communities safe and I want you to know that I fully understand these concerns and am committed to getting you what you need, to do the best for the people you serve.

We recognise there are multiple challenges. Following changes to working practices across healthcare, community pharmacists are now, more than ever, the first point of contact with the health system for many people. I am also aware of the long hours that pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and all pharmacy staff are working across the system. Our response to these concerns about front facing opening hours is that there is now flexibility in place to allow community pharmacies to regulate their hours to allow individual decision making on the best way to run their business. This allows pharmacists to focus on dispensing prescriptions and giving advice over the phone.

I met with Simon Dukes of the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) on Thursday 19 March and spoke to Simon and Sandra Gidley, the President of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society on Friday 20 March, 27th March & 2 April. We talked about the range of things that the Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England/Improvement could do to support community pharmacy to ensure sustainability over the coming months. There are ongoing discussions about what more can be done to support you including making funding available to help you with COVID pressures and the new services we are asking of community pharmacy during this time. I have also been listening to your concerns about capacity in community pharmacy.

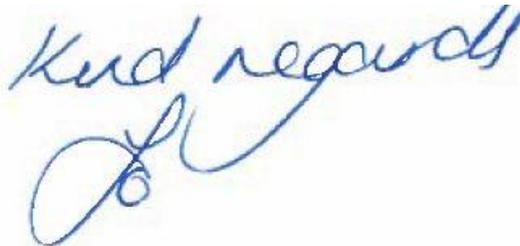
We have already:

- Ceased requirement for clinical audits and eased administrative reporting to reduce the burden of bureaucracy on pharmacies.
- Delayed the introduction of new services.
- Last week, introduced legislation to enable the prioritisation of the remaining services to further reduce workload.
- Introduced the legislative framework to allow for local services to be commissioned enabling community pharmacists to supply medicines that patients have been previously prescribed without a further prescription and are working to extend this to controlled drugs.
- Working closely with the PSNC, put in place a new backstop medicines delivery service to support the 1.4 million most vulnerable who are being shielded from this outbreak as agreed with the PSNC.
- Confirmed that all pharmacy staff, including counter assistants, should be considered “key workers”, together with staff in the broader medicines supply chain.

I know that there are more things to do and I am doing everything I can at pace to make these improvements. You are delivering a vital service for patients in the most challenging circumstances, and I will continue to support your efforts however I can.

We will continue to communicate updates to you via the established route of the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer Keith Ridge’s letters on the NHS England/Improvement website.

In the meantime, I reiterate my sincerest thanks for all that you are doing to support your communities and the most vulnerable in society.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kind regards" followed by a stylized signature.

JO CHURCHILL