

Natasha Douglas Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees Catalyst House 27 Yarm Road Stockton-on-Tees TS18 3NJ NHS North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board 14 Trinity Mews North Ormesby Health Village Middlesbrough TS3 6AL

24 May 2024

## **RE: Views and Experiences of People Accessing Pharmacy Services**

Dear Natasha,

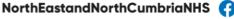
Thank you for sending us your latest report, which provides lived experience and insight from service users, carers and professionals on their concerns regarding accessing pharmacy services.

We recognise from the feedback featured within the report that there are positives around the introduction of the Think Pharmacy First and now the recent national Pharmacy First initiatives, and challenges regarding the allocation of stock, optimising the take up of Pharmacy First (note there is no activity data available from NHS England yet) continuously improving referral pathways, broader accessibility into pharmacy sites and spaces, and the needs of patients accessing emergency contraception services.

We have provided a response to your recommendations below:

		Recommendation	Comments
i	1.	Communication – Throughout this work plan item it has become apparent that clear and consistent information is not yet available. People did not feel informed about the additional role of pharmacies	We continually work to ensure that all our campaigns are effective and reach all members of the public, and welcome feedback on our work.
		and services available. Equally the understanding of the professionalism of a pharmacist was sporadic, resulting in a lack of confidence. Focus to be given to ensuring clarity of key messages to support the public in accessing the right service at the right time.	We will review the existing messages and information available to the public to ensure that it is consistent and clear. To support with this, some detail below has been provided about some of the initiatives in pharmacy provision.
			The North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board's (ICB) common conditions campaign aims to encourage the public to 'Think Pharmacy First' for over 40 minor conditions which community pharmacists can advise and treat under the ICB's regional common conditions scheme.

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It encourages people to consider seeking advice and/or medicines from their local community pharmacy, before contacting a GP practice or going to another healthcare setting, and is currently provided in all pharmacies across the North East and North Cumbria.

This campaign builds on the national 'Think Pharmacy First' offer which enables all community pharmacists to offer over the counter prescribed medication for seven common health conditions including earache, sinusitis, shingles, sore throats, infected insect bites, impetigo and minor urine infections without having to see a doctor or nurse. Women can also go to their local high street pharmacy to be prescribed the contraceptive pill instead of booking a GP appointment.

Both initiatives support the ICB's region-wide 'here to help' pharmacy campaign which aims to:

- build public understanding of and increase confidence in local pharmaceutical services
- increase patient awareness of the role of community pharmacy as the 'first port of call' for common conditions and medicines advice
- improve access for patients with common conditions
- identify ways patients can self-manage their health with the support of community pharmacists
- signpost to quick, convenient, and confidential consultations with community pharmacists
- increase uptake of NHS support available in community pharmacies
- reduce inappropriate use of GP and hospital services.

The pharmacy commissioning team in the ICB is working in partnership with Local Pharmaceutical representatives to deliver additional training sessions for pharmacies in connection with the new national initiative Pharmacy First, to enable patients to get the best possible clinical care.

The findings of the report are valuable, and we will consider these findings when looking to promote pharmacy services in the future. This feedback is helpful and the ICB is 2. **Referral Pathways** – Once assessed, committed to continuously improving referral and if considered appropriate pharmacists can refer to other health pathways. services, with the intention of improving access and reducing waiting times. Community Pharmacies are committed to However, increasingly it is becoming electronic referrals where appropriate. They more difficult and time-consuming for will also use e mails for referral when pharmacists to communicate via appropriate. The ICB work closely with the telephone, impacting negatively on Local Pharmaceutical Representatives. service delivery. Consideration to be including Tees area. given to alternative referral methods, for example emails or alternative contact We will feedback to the Local Pharmaceutical telephone numbers to be made available Committee with a view to optimising the smooth transition between services for to pharmacists to support a smooth transition between services. patients. **Review of allocation of stock** The ICB will feedback this important 3. information to the Local Pharmaceutical **medication** – Information given to us detailed concerns of larger pharmacies Committee. Part of the role of the Local actively choosing not to maintain stock of Pharmaceutical Committee is to support all more costly medication and signposting providers of services in best managing patients to smaller pharmacies. The cost operational issues. They will be able to raise implication was considered unfair. Further these concerns with the pharmacies to clarity to be gathered to help to alleviate understand their practices around medication any concerns. stock of medications and signposting with those practices. We would welcome the detail of the pharmacies in question and if this could be shared with us via the NENC ICB Involvement Team email: necsu.icb.involvement@nhs.net 4. **Resource** – As recovery plans begin to The ICB is working closely with our partners in take place, it is vital that adequate local Health and Wellbeing Boards and with resource is made available for the Local Pharmaceutical Committees around sustainable future growth of pharmacy patients' access, sustainability and pharmacy services. In places staff retention and resourcing. development is proving challenging. To ensure pharmacy services can continue We are pleased to confirm that pharmacies to support the health of our communities have additional funding for delivering the effectively, priority needs to be given to national "Think Pharmacy First" (seven the rapidly changing demand on services. common conditions) initiative as described above. Also, national negotiations are taking place between NHS England, Community Pharmacy

England and the Department of Health and Social Care regarding funding in the future. 5. Accessibility - Some people we spoke The ICB welcomes such feedback to ensure to told us of the challenges attending all vulnerable groups are well served. pharmacy services due to ill health or frailty, and the need to attend one or The ICB is working collaboratively with Health and Wellbeing Boards to assess accessibility more pharmacy to receive prescribed medication. Improved knowledge of to community pharmacy provision, any issues delivery services available would be and what measures may be appropriate to helpful, along with better use of text mitigate against the risk of patients not messaging services when prescriptions accessing medicines and wider essential are ready to collect. Consideration to be services. given to improving the use of these services. We were also made aware of This would be helpful feedback to the Stockton physical access concerns due to heavy Health and Wellbeing Board who have a doors and steps, identification of these statutory responsibility to publish the locations should be included in the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment (last one planning of the Pharmaceutical Needs 2022) and to refresh and update as necessary. Assessment, along with potential issues patients may have needing to access The ICB can feed this back through the alternative pharmacies. Reassurance is meetings they have with the Health and Wellbeing Board Pharmaceutical Needs sought from the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment leads. Assessment that the locality meets the aim of accessing pharmacy services within a 20-minute walk of a pharmacy and that there is additional pharmacy services in areas of deprivation. 6. Sexual Health Services - It has been The ICB welcomes this soft intelligence to feed back to NHS England, North-East & Yorkshire identified that due to cultural Region, in the interests of those patients requirements, some assessments and access to emergency contraception is accessing contraception services. denied. Clarity to be sought around policy and subsequent referral pathways. Pharmacies can sign up (optional) to deliver contraception services, called an advanced service over and above essential services. Again, the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment will identify practices where sexual health and access to emergency contraception provision is provided and if there are gaps in such provision. Public Health colleagues in Local Authorities commission sexual health provision on behalf of their communities and will be able to describe the provision available to residents in the Stockton-on-Tees area and how to access that provision.

Thank you very much for sharing this report and we look forward to reading the next one. Kind regards,

Anya Paradis

Director of Contracting & Oversight (North)

**Cc David Gallagher** – Chief Contracting & Procurement Officer, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board

**Karen Hawkins** – Director of Delivery (Tees Valley), North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board