

Key messages for general practice relating to the launch of Pharmacy First

As practices will be aware following the [letter](#) last week, the Pharmacy First service has now launched across England. Collaboration and shared understanding between healthcare professionals will be vital to the successful implementation of Pharmacy First. Below are some key messages for practices as the service rolls out.

Referrals to community pharmacies

Practices should continue to refer appropriate patients to the new service, following the same process as for Community Pharmacy Consultation service (CPCS). Practices are responsible for clinical governance relating to referrals made into Pharmacy First.

From today, practices can begin referring for the seven conditions.

Following a formal referral to the pharmacy, the patient should be advised to contact the pharmacy and that the pharmacist will be expecting the patient to make contact that day or when the pharmacy is next open.

Referrals back to general practice

In line with routine practice, there will be a small number of referrals that the pharmacy will need to escalate to a higher acuity setting or back to the general practice. The process for referring back to the practice should be agreed locally.

Updating the patient record

For the first few weeks of the new Pharmacy First service, consultation outcomes will flow back to practices like CPCS currently does via NHS Mail. Practices should continue to follow the usual process for reviewing and updating the patient record during this time.

As part of our ongoing drive to reduce burdens in practices, we have worked with suppliers to redesign how pharmacy consultation outcomes are shared back to practices. The proposed updates to the record will surface directly in workflows, enabling practice staff to more easily review Pharmacy First consultation outcomes (including notes and any medicines provided) and add data to the patient record with one click of a button. These changes will automatically roll out through your GP clinical system supplier throughout February. User guides are available from [EMIS](#) and [TPP](#).

Pharmacies will not use the update record process to communicate urgent information or actions for the GP. Pharmacy staff will continue directly contacting the practice to raise awareness of any urgent information or actions.

Pharmacies' access to the patient record

There is currently no change to the patient information that pharmacies can access. Alongside the enhancements we are making to update the record, we are exploring how we can make it easier for pharmacists to have all the relevant health information they need to support consultations, as outlined in the Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care. We will keep you and your professional representatives up to date as this progresses.

From launch today, pharmacists will continue to use the National Care Record Service (NCRS) and established processes to manage patients safely, where any additional information they need is gained from the patient in consultation, in line with the new clinical pathways for the conditions. They will exercise their clinical judgement on the appropriate course of action, including referral or escalation to other care settings.

Once the practice has added this to the patient record, details of any medication supplied as part of a Pharmacy First consultation will be available via NCRS. GPs and practice teams will continue to have discretion about how much information is added to the patient record. Once the new update record functionality is in place over the coming weeks, this will speed up the filing of messages and the surfacing of medicines information in NCRS.

Antimicrobial Stewardship

This service has been designed with antimicrobial stewardship being a key priority. Pharmacy teams have been using [RCGP TARGET](#) materials to discuss the issue of antimicrobial resistance with patients. Surveillance of antimicrobial supply will be closely monitored and scrutinised as this service is implemented.

Prescription charges

Normal prescription charge arrangements apply to supplies of NHS medicines made under a Patient Group Direction or clinical protocol. The pharmacist may recommend over-the-counter medicines for self-care of a minor illness. In this instance, the patient will need to purchase the medication.