



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Lord Kamall
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Innovation (Lords)*

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU
Tel: 020 7210 4850*

By email:

18 July 2022

My Lords,

I write to further respond to questions from your Lordships, during the debate on Thursday 28 June on the Draft Pharmacy (Responsible Pharmacist Superintendent Pharmacist) Order 2022, about dispensing doctors, the rate of closures of community pharmacies and the timelines for the introduction of new regulations under the Draft Order.

Dispensing doctors

Patients should receive their NHS-prescribed medicines promptly, efficiently, and conveniently. Pharmacies will not always be viable in every part of the country, especially in more rural areas. That is where the services of dispensing doctors play a vital role; ensuring patients receive their medicines from the surgery's dispensary avoiding the need for a possibly very lengthy journey to their nearest pharmacy.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has published interim advice stating that they are likely to recommend a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in autumn 2022 for residents and staff of older adult care homes; people aged 65 and over; people aged 16 to 64 years who are in a clinical risk group; and frontline health and social care workers.

To deliver this, Integrated Care Boards are currently developing plans which use a mixed model of providers running vaccination sites, including general practices, community pharmacies, larger-scale Vaccination Centres, and hospitals, to ensure that in every area, patients have good access to vaccinations. Local sites are encouraged to offer the flu vaccine at the same time as the COVID-19 vaccine where this is operationally possible and clinically appropriate.

Dispensing doctors play an important role in our provision of primary care across the country. All GP practices, including dispensing practices, are invited to sign up to deliver the COVID-19 vaccination programme in the autumn by working in groups of practices.

Community Pharmacy closures

Between 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2021, 516 community pharmacies closed. The majority of permanent closures were pharmacies that were part of large chains, which aligned with announcements made by those companies about restructuring and consolidating their businesses. In England, 80 per cent of the population live within 20

minutes walking distance of a community pharmacy. There are over 11,000 community pharmacies, a similar number to a decade ago.

Maintaining access to NHS pharmaceutical services continues to remain a key priority for this Government. The Department closely monitors the market and continues to work in partnership with NHS England to evaluate the effect of closures on patient access. To protect access in areas where there are fewer pharmacies, the Government provides additional funding through the Pharmacy Access Scheme.

The Pharmacy Access Scheme was introduced from December 2016 and was reviewed as part of Year 3 (2021/22) of the Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework 2019-24 five-year deal. The scheme supports patient access and provision in areas where there are fewer community pharmacies by providing additional payments to pharmacies.

Timetable for the pharmacy regulators to bring forward new regulations

Noble Lords also asked about the timescale for work following the introduction of the draft order. Parliament has given its approval, but approval must also be sought from the Privy Council before the orders may enter into force. Once the Privy Council has approved the Orders and agreed commencement, the regulators in Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the General Pharmaceutical Council and the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland) will set out their anticipated timescales and engagement plans with the sector. This will be done primarily in respect of their new powers to establish professional rules/regulations concerning how the statutory roles of the responsible pharmacist, superintendent pharmacist and chief pharmacist are fulfilled.

I hope this response is helpful and addresses the additional issues that I was unable to respond to during the debate.

A copy of this letter has been sent to Noble Lords who spoke during the debate and a copy has been deposited in the library.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Syed', with a large, stylized initial 'S'.

LORD KAMALL