



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Lord Markham
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State*

*39 Victoria Street
London
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01 March 2024

Dear Noble Lords,

I am writing to share further information following the debate on 6 February 2024 on the Statement made in the House of Commons on Wednesday 31 January on the launch of Pharmacy First.

During the debate I promised to write to address questions from Baroness Merron, Lord Allan of Hallam and Viscount Waverly.

Baroness Merron asked why the Pharmacy First pathway for urinary tract infections is limited to women up to the age of 64. The eligibility criteria for the Pharmacy First pathways, including the urinary tract infections pathway, have been informed by guidance from the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and were designed with input from an expert panel of clinicians. Patients should be referred to a prescriber (such as a GP) for treatment if they meet one of the exclusion criteria, one of which is being 65 or over. In women who are 65 or over, the risk that symptoms of urinary tract infections are caused by something else is higher than in women who are under 65. As such, it is considered more appropriate that they see their GP and not their pharmacist. NHS England will however keep this under review.

Lord Allan of Hallam raised the issue of processing paper prescriptions by the NHS Business Service Authority (NHSBSA) to enable payment of pharmacies. I can assure him that significant progress has been made on digitalising the entire process. The Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) sends electronic prescriptions from prescribers to dispensers meaning that there is no longer a need for paper prescription for most prescription. In 2022/23, 96 percent of all items dispensed in primary care were dispensed via the EPS. The EPS also allows pharmacies to electronically submit prescriptions for payment to the NHSBSA. There are some instances in which the EPS cannot be used, for example for some controlled drugs, instalment prescriptions or items not yet included in the electronic systems. In those instances, a paper prescription is required which will need to be processed manually by the NHSBSA.

Finally, **Viscount Waverly** raised a concern around the costs of purchasing non-medical items, such as razor blades, from pharmacies. Community pharmacies are of course private businesses. The sale of non-medical items are not part of the NHS services they are commissioned to provide. As such the

prices they charge for these items are at the discretion of the pharmacy and consumers have the choice to buy these items from the pharmacy or elsewhere.

A copy of this letter has been deposited in the Libraries of the House.

With my very best wishes,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of stylized, flowing letters that appear to be 'M', 'A', and 'R'.

LORD MARKHAM CBE