

# Half of at-risk flu patients are still not vaccinated

February 3 2014, by Lindsay Brooke

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(Medical Xpress)—A new study by The University of Nottingham and Boots UK reveals community pharmacy can play an important role in getting more at-risk patients vaccinated against flu, including those with diabetes and pregnant women.

Professor Claire Anderson from the School of Pharmacy said: "There is a recognised need to continue to drive uptake flu vaccinations for patients in at-risk groups but achieving the level required is challenging and requires innovative thinking and new approaches. Community pharmacy is currently an underused resource within the NHS and this latest research demonstrates a valuable role pharmacy can play as part of an integrated healthcare system."

The research: "It's easier in pharmacy": why some patients prefer to pay for flu jabs rather than use the National Health Service, has been

published online in the open access journal *BMC Health Services Research*.

The NHS and WHO (World Health Organisation) have set a target of 75% of at-risk patients to receive a flu vaccination, however during the winter of 2011/12 there was only a 50% uptake. The new study highlights the integrated role community pharmacy can play, working alongside GPs, in reaching patients unlikely to access the service at their surgery.

The research analysed data collected from a sample of Boots UK community pharmacies during 2012/2013. It reveals that despite being eligible for a flu vaccination free on the NHS some patients still preferred to pay for the service at their local pharmacy.

## **Working more closely with community pharmacy**

Peter Bainbridge, Director of Pharmacy at Boots UK comments: "50% of at-risk patients are not receiving their flu vaccination and we believe community pharmacy can help reduce this number. Patients tell us that a pharmacy is a convenient and accessible option for getting their flu vaccination. We are near to where they work and have opening hours that suit their busy lives. At-risk patients regularly visit our pharmacies to collect their prescription and to seek advice and support so our pharmacists are also well placed to remind them of the importance of immunisation."

Rob Darracott, Chief Executive, Pharmacy Voice said: "It is encouraging that many people are choosing to pay to have their flu vaccination in community pharmacies even when they are eligible for NHS vaccinations because of the accessibility and convenience of the pharmacy service. Clearly there are opportunities for community pharmacy to support the NHS and GPs in delivering free flu

vaccinations to patients at risk by targeting those patients unlikely to access services at the GP surgery. Dispensing Health, the new campaign from Pharmacy Voice is designed to raise public awareness of pharmacy services such as flu vaccination which make an important contribution to staying well."

## **Patients are paying when they don't have to**

The study collected data for 89,011 private paying patients of which 5,340 were eligible for a free flu vaccination on the NHS but despite being told this by the pharmacist still decided to pay for the service.

During the winter of 2012/2013 flu vaccinations were available in 586 participating Boots pharmacies in England at a cost of £12.99. Boots UK were also commissioned to deliver the NHS service via patient group directions (PGDs) in 258 of these pharmacies.

PGDs are written instructions for the supply or administration of medicines to groups of patients who may not be individually identified before presentation for treatment. This means in stores with a PGD, patients can get a flu vaccination without having to get a prescription from their GP, thus enhancing the convenience of the service. PGDs have become an important way of providing and administering medicines to [patients](#), and they are an integral part of the new ways of working for pharmacy and other healthcare professionals in both the NHS and private sector

Under 65 years of age are at risk because of other conditions such as chronic respiratory disease, chronic heart disease, diabetes, being immunocompromised as well as [pregnant women](#) and frontline health and social care workers.

The long term NHS flu vaccination target in England was to achieve

70% vaccine uptake among the under-65s in a clinical risk group in 2012/2013 and 75% by 2013/2014.

Patients in at risk groups are eligible to get a free vaccination on the NHS in England.

The majority of [flu vaccinations](#) administered through community pharmacy are currently private rather than NHS.

Provided by University of Nottingham

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