

Using community pharmacists differently 'can reduce pressures on GPs'

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Giving pharmacists a greater role in patient care could ease the huge pressure on GP services, if they are supported in doing so, according to a new policy report co-produced by researchers at the University of Strathclyde.

With many patients struggling to book a routine GP appointment, owing to ever-increasing demands on services, the research team says that giving support to [community pharmacists](#) to help manage long-term and urgent conditions could significantly improve access to treatments.

The authors analyzed governmental and pharmacy policies in England and spoke to patients and other stakeholders to explore their opinions of the future of community pharmacy.

As a result, they recommend that in the future, medicines could be dispensed automatically at large, centralized facilities and then delivered to the patient's community pharmacy for collection.

The proposed 'hub and spoke' model differs from existing practice in England, in which pharmacists typically prepare prescriptions sent by GPs. The researchers say it would free up the time of community pharmacy staff to provide more patient-facing services, in turn relieving pressure on GP surgeries.

The policy brief, developed with researchers from the University of Bath, was launched at an event in the House of Commons, attended by MPs, senior policymakers and members of the pharmacy industry.

Professor Margaret Watson, Professor of Health Services Research and Pharmacy Practice with the Strathclyde Institute of Pharmacy and Biomedical Sciences, said, "Community pharmacy personnel achieved so much throughout the COVID-19 pandemic; imagine what could be achieved with appropriate funding and workforce enablement.

Pharmacists are society's experts on medicines, which are the most commonly used health care treatment. Government investment in community pharmacy services isn't just good for health; it's essential for building a better future for the people of Britain."

In June 2023, the UK Government announced the NHS Workforce Plan, which included proposals to increase the number of pharmacists in England 29% in the next five years and grow the number of pharmacy technicians to address the changing needs of patients over the next 15 years.

This complements the announcement of its Delivery Plan for Recovering Access to Primary Care, aiming to provide 'pharmacy first' prescription-only medicines for seven common conditions.

The findings of this project have been submitted as evidence to the Commons Health & Social Care Committee's current Pharmacy Inquiry.

Provided by University of Strathclyde, Glasgow

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