



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

Máinnystrie O Poustie

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**Department of Health Strategic
Planning and Performance Group
(SPPG)**



**PHARMACY FIRST SERVICE for everyday
health conditions**

GP Practice Receptionists' Protocol

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Section 1 Introduction

Community Pharmacists already advise patients on a wide range of everyday health conditions and either recommend treatment or refer on to another healthcare professional. The Pharmacy First Service builds upon this expertise allowing community pharmacists to supply some treatments, if they are considered necessary, free of charge to eligible patients on the health service. There is no cost to the practice for this service.

A pharmacy first service within community pharmacy improves patient access to health care services and encourages the use of pharmacy as a first point of call for health consultations for everyday health conditions. This reduces the demands that such consultations can make on GPs time.

Community pharmacies are well placed within communities and offer an open door to everyone. There are over 520 pharmacies across Northern Ireland with a pharmacist on hand to offer free independent health advice.

Therefore provision of a pharmacy first service from community pharmacies:

- Encourages patients to self-treat everyday health conditions.
- Supports the use of the pharmacy as a first point of call for health advice and allows the pharmacist to make more use of their professional skills.
- Improves patient accessibility to treatment without the need of an appointment.
- Benefits other parts of the healthcare service particularly Emergency Departments and Out-Of-Hours medical services.

This protocol is intended to help receptionists when they are recommending patients to use the Pharmacy First Service. It may also be linked to information about making an appointment with the most appropriate healthcare professional.

Section 2 Procedure

If a patient telephones or calls at a surgery for a prescription or an appointment, they will often describe their symptoms unasked. If the symptoms are among those included in the pharmacy first service, the receptionist may:

- Explain that they may obtain advice and treatment from a participating pharmacist without having to wait for an appointment with a doctor
- Ensure that the patient is aware that they have a choice.

For patients making an appointment by telephone

- If the patient is telephoning a request for a routine appointment, the receptionist must avoid directly asking what the problem is. The receptionist may, using his/her judgement, discern that the request is related to an everyday health condition covered by the pharmacy first service. If so, the receptionist could say to the patient: **“You may not be aware that there is a Pharmacy First Service operating in the area. Patients may go to a participating pharmacy to receive advice and treatment rather than having to wait for an appointment. The conditions included in the Service are ... [Acne Vulgaris, Athlete’s foot, Acute Diarrhoea, Ear wax, Groin area infection, Haemorrhoids, Head lice, Mouth ulcers, Scabies, Threadworms, Oral thrush, Vaginal thrush or Verrucae]. Does your illness come into any of these categories?”**
- If the patient says yes, the receptionist may then ask if they would like to use this service rather than coming to see the doctor. It is important to note that it should be left to the patient to make the choice.

For patients making an appointment in person

- If the patient is presenting in person, the receptionist should, using the same terminology as before, inform them that there is a service in operation and that they can be directed to a local pharmacist for advice and treatment rather than waiting for an appointment.

For all patients

- Patients may receive advice only, or advice and treatment after appropriate assessment by the pharmacist. If medication is required, it will be supplied from the agreed formulary free-of-charge.
- Patients are expected to attend the pharmacy in person.
- If a patient chooses not to take advantage of the service then an appointment with the GP should be made in the normal way.
- Advise patients that they can use any of the pharmacies that are providing the service.

Good practice points

- Following transfer into the service it is good practice to record this in the patient's notes or computer record
- Include the appropriate read code

Section 3 Conditions

1. Acne Vulgaris
2. Athlete's Foot
3. Acute Diarrhoea
4. Ear Wax
5. Groin Area Infection
6. Haemorrhoids
7. Head Lice
8. Mouth Ulcers
9. Scabies
10. Threadworms
11. Oral Thrush
12. Vaginal Thrush
13. Verrucae

Section 4 Age Limits

The service is only available to patients aged over 3 months. However, not every medication listed on the service formulary is suitable for all patients. The service matches the over-the-counter licensed age ranges for the included medications.

The minimum age of a patient that can be treated under the pharmacy first service is 3 months, irrespective of whether or not the product license covers use in younger children. For some medicines, the minimum age limit is greater than 3 months.

Inappropriate Referrals

1. If a GP has made a decision about the medicine a patient needs, then a prescription must be issued. A GP cannot write a prescription for one item and refer the patient to the service for another named item.

Please note: Pharmacists will refer patients back to the surgery if they are inappropriately referred into the service.

Section 5 Fast Track Referral System

If the patient presents at the pharmacy with symptoms indicating the need for an immediate consultation with the GP, a locally agreed method for urgent referral should be instigated.

This may be

1. A locally agreed referral form;
2. Patient advised to telephone the surgery;
3. The pharmacist telephoning the surgery on the patient's behalf.

Therefore, GP practices and pharmacists are encouraged to establish a local fast track referral system that suits their needs.

Section 6 Promoting the Service

Practices may wish to promote the service through a variety of means for example

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Using SPPG promotional materials which are available to download from the [Primary Care Intranet](#). These include A4 and A3 posters and Twitter & Instagram resources.

Ultimately, whatever way the practice chooses to promote this service, consideration should be given to ensuring patients are given the appropriate information in order to avail of the service and to maximise benefits.

Please contact your local Integrated Care office if you have any queries.

Contact Details for Local Integrated Care Offices:				
Belfast	South Eastern	Southern	Northern	Western
12-22 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BS	12-22 Linenhall Street Belfast BT2 8BS	Tower Hill Armagh. BT61 9DR	County Hall 182 Galgorm Road Ballymena BT42 1QB	Gransha Park House 15 Gransha Park Clooney Road Londonderry BT47 6FN
Tel: 028 9536 3926	Tel: 028 9536 3926	Tel: 028 9536 2104	Tel: 028 9536 2812	Tel: 028 9536 1082
pharmacyservicesbelfast@hscni.net	pharmacyservices@hscni.net	pharmacyservices@hscni.net	pharmacyservices@hscni.net	pharmacyservices@hscni.net

Section 7- Pharmacy First Service Flow Chart – GP Referral

