



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

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The Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Chair
Health and Social Care Committee
House of Commons
Westminster
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16 April 2020

Dear Jeremy,

Thank you for your letter of the 3rd April 2020. I understand the concerns expressed in your meeting with the National Pharmacy Association (NPA), many of which have been echoed by the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC).

We continue to review the current funding plans for the pharmacy sector. As a first step, a cash injection of £300 million, paid across April and May, has been made to address the extra costs that have been incurred in delivering services during the first months when prescription volume and demand for health advice increased, and extra staffing has been necessary in some pharmacies. We continue to assess the need for further cash flow support for pharmacies' drugs bills that will be due at the end of April. Discussions are also taking place to determine the level of any additional resource, above and beyond the £2.592 billion annual funding envelope, that may be necessary to support community pharmacy. The PSNC is working closely with officials to build the evidence base for any such extra funding. This will also take into account the services and activities suspended within the community pharmacy contractual framework during the pandemic to enable community pharmacy to prioritise the response to COVID-19.

The Department (DHSC), NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHS E-I) and Public Health England (PHE) have also been working to ensure that the resources are available to support the safety of pharmacy teams with Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). We will continue to keep this under review and work at pace to ensure pharmacy staff have access to the appropriate PPE for COVID-19.

An initial 'push pack' of PPE was distributed in March to all community pharmacies in England. As we move forward community pharmacies can now obtain further supplies of fluid-resistant surgical masks (FRSM) through their business as usual wholesaler routes. This is in line with the latest PPE guidance that has been issued from PHE, which recommends sessional use of FRSM in a pharmacy setting where social distancing cannot be maintained from patients. The guidance also states that there is no indication for PPE within a pharmacy setting, if social distancing of 2 metres is maintained from patients.

Furthermore, to protect and reassure community pharmacy staff where social distancing is either not appropriately observed by patients or is not possible in smaller pharmacies, NHS E-I have announced that they will pay £300 to community pharmacies to support installation of physical barriers such as screens, retractable tape barriers or other adjustments to help enforce social distancing, thereby reducing the need for sessional use of FRSM.

In relation to testing of staff, on 27th March further information was published by DHSC on gov.uk website advising that free testing will be provided for NHS staff, including community pharmacy; at drive-through locations. PSNC have also published this information on their website. Testing for NHS staff is initially being prioritised for those working in critical care, emergency departments and ambulance services, and any other high priority groups determined locally. As extra lab volumes become available, the approach will be extended to community, mental health and primary care services, including community pharmacy, along with social care.

Ministers continue to hold regular meetings, with representatives of those supporting the public in dealing with COVID-19, to understand and address current issues. We are committed to doing everything we can to support pharmacies and other front-line health and care professionals.

On behalf of all Health Ministers, I would also like to take this opportunity to personally thank yourself, the NPA and to others working in community pharmacy and the public during these difficult times, as we work jointly to rise to the challenges which this disease is throwing up. We are living through unprecedented times and I recognise that pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and their teams across the country are providing an outstanding response to patients in challenging circumstances.

Yours ever,



MATT HANCOCK