



Chemist+Druggist
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Dr Andrew Green
Clinical and Prescribing Policy Lead
General Practitioners Committee UK
British Medical Association
BMA House
Tavistock Square
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1 November 2017

Dear Dr Green,

I am writing in response to your comments to Chemist+Druggist (C+D) in August, regarding NHS England's decision to recommission the national flu vaccination service in community pharmacies.

Your statements have caused concern among some of our community pharmacist readers, and – we believe – are helping to contribute to a culture where certain GP practices feel entitled to deter their patients from freely choosing to receive a flu vaccination in their local pharmacy.

As you may remember, on August 31 you told C+D that many GPs would be “surprised” at NHS England's decision to commission the national pharmacy flu service for a third year, as there was “still no conclusive evidence” that the scheme “has demonstrated a significant increase in overall uptake”.

You also claimed that “in some areas” the service has “undermined the good working relationships between practices and pharmacists, which has long-term implications that reach well beyond the flu campaign”.

C+D is concerned that these statements not only serve to undermine the service – and by extension, the community pharmacy teams who deliver it – in the eyes of your members, but also ignore the great benefit it provides to patients.

The latest data shows that in the first eight weeks of the current flu season, almost 900,000 vaccinations have already been administered across community pharmacies in England. Last flu season, 98% of patients who received their vaccination in a community pharmacy said they were “very satisfied” by the service they received. These figures are testament to the accessibility, convenience and quality of this pharmacy service, as well as patients' desire for a choice of location to receive their vaccination.

Since your comments, C+D has received another wave of reports of GP practices deterring their patients from visiting a community pharmacy for their flu jab. In October alone, these reports have included a GP surgery in Doncaster threatening to withhold repeat prescriptions from patients if they don't get

vaccinated at the surgery, and a notice handed out to patients in an Eastbourne GP surgery, claiming pharmacy flu jabs could threaten its ability to provide other services.

Tactics of this nature have already been condemned by other national bodies. Last year, NHS England said it “expects general practices and pharmacies to work together to ensure as many eligible people as possible take up the offer of a flu jab”, while the Royal College of General Practitioners stated: “It is an individual’s choice where they get vaccinated.”

Yet we would argue it is not entirely unsurprising if certain GP practices feel entitled to continue to use these methods, when an organisation as influential as the BMA has publically expressed doubt in the pharmacy service.

With flu vaccinations forming a key component of Public Health England’s *Stay Well This Winter* initiative, surely health professionals should work together to vaccinate as many at-risk individuals as possible? Not only is this good for patients, it is ultimately good for the NHS, as it will help ease seasonal pressures on A&E departments and shorten GP waiting lists.

Alongside the reports mentioned above, C+D is also aware of other areas of the country where practices and pharmacies are working together to maximise vaccine uptake. We believe GPs, pharmacists and – most importantly – patients would benefit from the BMA espousing this positive message of collaboration.

We therefore strongly urge you to issue a statement calling on BMA members to collaborate – rather than compete – with local pharmacies to deliver the flu service, while denouncing the use of any tactics designed to restrict patients’ freedom to choose where they receive their vaccination.

By working together, C+D believes the two professions will make Public Health England’s aim of getting as many eligible people vaccinated as possible a reality.

We look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. R. Collins', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Annabelle Collins
Deputy News Editor
Chemist + Druggist (C+D)