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To:
Directors of Pharmacy
Community Pharmacy Scotland

Community Pharmacy Service Delivery – Essential Drug Services: COVID-19

We previously wrote to you on 13 February 2020 regarding the provision of naloxone through pharmacies, and I would like to thank you for your response to the request for information. Naloxone distribution remains a key part of the strategy of our Drug Death Task Force to reduce drug related deaths. Since then there have been a number of significant changes due to the impact of COVID-19 therefore we wanted to write to you again to thank you for your continued support in maintaining service-level provision for drug and alcohol services, as part of your on-going commitment to tackling drug and alcohol related harm.

As you will be aware, Opioid Substitution Therapy (OST) is an evidence based treatment that protects against fatal overdose and promotes health and recovery of individuals. Access to OST also has wider community benefits including reduced criminality and reduced diversion of prescribed doses. The role of Community Pharmacy in delivering OST is vital in protecting the health of the individual and of the wider community.

Community pharmacy delivery of opiate replacement treatment, injecting equipment provision and naloxone provision are all key components in reducing harm and drug related deaths. The continued delivery and supply of these vital services is even more important during the current pandemic, which will be having a greater impact amongst our more vulnerable populations.

We are working closely with local and national counterparts to ensure the above treatments and provisions are continued as essential services, and that these services continue to be provided in a non-stigmatising manner. As stigma is a major barrier to meaningful treatment engagement we would encourage contractors to consult with patients and treatment services when making changes to service delivery. Effective communication with and from prescribers and treatment services is essential at this time to protect individuals and communities from the effects of drug related harms.

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We recognise that there is the possibility of increased risk of harm, and overdose in particular, due to the changes in the way services may have to be delivered with less supervision and increased dispensing intervals, and we appreciate that you will be taking this into account in the delivery of services, and taking the necessary steps to mitigate this.

The Drug Death Taskforce recently published a number of recommendations to reduce risks associated with the pandemic. This followed feedback from services and communities which suggests that service-level provision is being scaled back in some areas.

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/drug-deaths-taskforce-covid-19-recommendations--16-april-2020/>

We would like to reiterate our thanks and support to the pharmacy community around Scotland particularly for overcoming the challenges you are facing and continuing to deliver vital services for this vulnerable group of people during this difficult period.



Joe FitzPatrick MSP

Minister for Public Health, Sport and Wellbeing



Catriona Matheson, FRPharmS

Chair, Drug Death Taskforce



Dr Rose Marie Parr

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer