**COVID-19 update**

**Information correct as of 4pm 11 June 2020**

**In this edition**

* Updates to the COVID-19 web page
* Direction of Prescriptions
* EPS nomination and direction of electronic prescriptions
* Freedom of choice

**Attachments**

* none

All information provided in the COVID-19 bulletin is hosted online at <https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/rss/home/infections-and-microbiology/covid-19/>

**Updates to the COVID-19 web page**

National and regional updates

[Pregnancy and coronavirus: communication materials](https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=4063&inline=1)

[Covid-19 infection - Discharge from A&E or GP consultation patient advice leaflet](https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=4058&inline=1&inline=1&inline=1)

[Covid-19 infection - Discharge from hospital stay patient advice leaflet](https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=4057&inline=1&inline=1&inline=1)

Prescribing and Community Pharmacy updates

[Direction of prescriptions](https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=4061&inline=1)

[Poster on freedom of choice](https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=4060&inline=1)

[EPS nomination and direction of electronic prescriptions](https://www.valeofyorkccg.nhs.uk/seecmsfile/?id=4062&inline=1)

**Direction of Prescriptions**

The CCG has been made aware that at the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic a GP Practice took action to increase the number of patients using the electronic prescription service (EPS), to reduce footfall into the GP Practice and reduce the need for the collection of paper prescriptions, in line with the [national request from NHS England sent to all GP Practices on 19th March 2020](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/preparedness-letter-primary-care-19-march-2020.pdf). This is indeed what we encourage and support.

However, at the same time, the GP Practice also decided to nominate a pharmacy for the patient by sending a text message. Nominating a pharmacy on behalf of a patient, without informed consent from the patient is not allowed and is deemed as direction of prescriptions by the GP Practice. Direction of prescriptions is a very serious matter and there has been no change to the current regulation in this regard.  Please see below several sources of guidance on the direction of prescriptions. This information has also been made available for download from the dedicated COVID-19 web page.

**Direction of prescriptions**

The term ‘direction of prescriptions’ is used to describe the exercise of undue influence by a medical practice over the choice of where a patient takes or sends their prescription to be dispensed. It can also be used to describe situations where pharmacy owners and pharmacists encourage medical practitioners to recommend their pharmacy, by way of offering a gift or reward.

Prescription direction should not take place. Patients are entitled to make decisions about where they want their prescriptions to be dispensed; therefore, if a patient prefers to use a particular pharmacy, the NHS Constitution requires that this preference is respected.

**Poster on freedom of choice (published by NHS)**

Patients should be able to choose their own pharmacy, based on the convenience to them and the quality of service that is provided. A poster which sets out the right for patients to make their own choice has been produced and pharmacies are asked to display this prominently and as close as practicable to the location where patients receive prescriptions. Distance selling and internet pharmacies should display this information prominently on their websites and take reasonable steps to bring this notice to the attention of all patients, for example by including a copy of this notice with dispensed medicines that are delivered to patients.

In October 2015, NHS England wrote to all general practices and pharmacies to ask for their help in ensuring that all patients are aware of their right to choose freely without influence. [NHS England letter to pharmacies](https://psnc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Directing-of-Perscriptions-covering-letter-FINAL.pdf)

The poster can be downloaded below and a copy has been sent to all pharmacies in the October edition of Community Pharmacy News which will arrive later during October 2015. [Poster on freedom of choice](https://psnc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Poster-combatting-prescription-direction-FINAL-MAIN.pdf) (pdf)

**EPS nomination and direction of electronic prescriptions**

In April 2005, the National Health Service (Primary Medical Services) (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005 came into force which stipulates that when operating the [Electronic Prescription Service (EPS)](https://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/eps/), a prescriber must not seek to persuade a patient to [nominate](https://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/eps/patient-nomination-of-a-dispensing-site/) a dispenser recommended by the prescriber. The regulations also state that, if asked to recommend a chemist, the prescriber is to provide a list of all chemists in the area that operate EPS, as provided by the local NHS England Team (this provision is continued by the National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2015 – see Regulation 58 (4)).

* The GMC have [guidelines](https://www.gmc-uk.org/guidance/ethical_guidance/21161.asp) (see the section called “Decisions on Patient Care”) linked to the direction of prescriptions which make it clear that patients should be free to choose from which pharmacy to have their prescribed medicines dispensed and doctors must not allow their own or their employers’ financial or commercial interests in a pharmacy to influence the way they advise their patients. A doctor’s failure to adhere to these standards could form the basis of a complaint of professional misconduct.

BMA and PSNC Joint Guidance – Jan 2020 <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/gp-practices/prescribing/prescription-direction-to-certain-pharmacies>

GMC Guidance <https://www.gmc-uk.org/ethical-guidance/learning-materials/prescription-direction>

All our GP Practices are encouraged to enable and utilise EPS, in line with the [letter sent from NHSE to primary care on 19th March 2020](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/preparedness-letter-primary-care-19-march-2020.pdf).

The guidance regarding direction of prescriptions has not changed/been relaxed during the Covid-19 pandemic, patients must be offered choice and the patient must nominate the preferred pharmacy, not be led to a specific pharmacy by a GP Practice.

Please note - The [guidance on electronic repeat dispensing (eRD) has recently changed – 04.06.2020](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/wp-content/uploads/sites/52/2020/03/C0546-electronic-repeat-dispensing-letter-4-june-2020.pdf)  and the latest guidance regarding eRD temporarily relaxes the need for patient consent for eRD. This does not affect the rules regarding nominating a pharmacy, the patient must still nominate their preferred pharmacy, as detailed above.

If you are unsure about anything related to the content of this email please seek advice and guidance from the CCG Medicines Management Team - VOYCCG.Rxline@nhs.net