



6 April 2020

Dear Home Secretary,

Community pharmacy is the most accessible part of the health system at all times, offering public access to a qualified health professional in the heart of every community without an appointment. In this crisis period, around the world, it is community pharmacies that remain open, being recognised as essential services. In the UK, with GP practices all but closed to patients, volumes in community pharmacy have risen by around 40%.

We are the largest pharmacist organisation and only independent trade union exclusively for pharmacists in the UK, with over 30,000 members. You will no doubt be aware that many high street workers face abuse in their working environments and like some colleagues in retail this has included verbal and physical abuse. We have a longstanding campaign to end such violence in pharmacies and to protect our members, their colleagues, and other patients. Several Police & Crime Commissioners and police forces have engaged in our campaign and we continue to work with them.

However, in this current situation our members report that the abuse, disrespect and in some cases, violence have escalated becoming an everyday experience while they work tirelessly to protect the nation's health. Together with concerns over the availability of PPE they remain concerned for their own safety and that of their families as well as their patients. We have raised separately the availability of PPE with the Health & Social Care Secretary and Health Ministers in the devolved nations.

As pressures on our members in the pharmacy team continue it is completely unacceptable that they should also be subject to such abuse. On Friday afternoon alone we are aware of at least one incident to which police were called after an assault on a pharmacist. We are supporting our members and will be liaising with the employers concerned.

While we have reiterated to pharmacist employers that they have a legal duty to maintain the health and safety of employees, even in times of crisis, we believe that you are in a position to assist by raising the profile of abuse of pharmacists across the criminal justice system. We ask you to make a statement urging the public to treat pharmacists and all staff with the respect and courtesy which they deserve.

Our members are on the front line. They need to have the support of all parts of the government to continue to do their job. We hope we rely on your support in reiterating to people this abuse will not be tolerated and that we all need to be kind and respectful.