



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Jo Churchill MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Prevention,
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Mr Mark Koziol
Chairman
Pharmacists' Defence Association
By email to: mark.koziol@the-pda.org

16 July 2020

Dear Mr Koziol,

Thank you for your correspondence of 26 March to Matt Hancock about the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and personal protective equipment (PPE) for community pharmacy. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I would first like to extend my thanks and appreciation for the frontline work that pharmacists are doing during this crisis.

The Government has put in place an unprecedented financial support package for all businesses, including community pharmacies. It contains, among other measures, tax deferrals and cash grants of up to £25,000 for small businesses.

Additionally, since March £350 million has been made available in advance payments to alleviate initial cash-flow pressures. There was also an increase of £15 million per month to reimbursement prices of the most commonly prescribed generic medicines from June. Additional funding has been provided to cover the new medicine-delivery service for shielded patients.

On 31 March, we announced a contribution of £300 to all community pharmacies that remained open, for the purchase and installation of physical barriers such as screens and retractable tape barriers or other adjustments to help enforce social distancing between their staff and patients. We made available an additional payment of £250 per hour – a total of £2,250 per community pharmacy – to cover the associated costs of community pharmacies opening for the Good Friday, Easter Monday and 8 May bank holidays. They were asked to do so, as GPs were also asked to maintain normal service on these days. The data indicates that, overall, the services were very well utilised over those bank holidays and I am grateful to all the teams whose pharmacies opened. As the pandemic was easing by the end of May, GP practices were not asked to open on the late May bank holiday and neither were pharmacies that were not planning to do so as part of their normal practice.

The Department will continue to work closely with the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) and the NHS to assess the need for additional resources, above and beyond the annual £2.592 billion Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework funding, and for any further cash flow to support contractors in paying their drugs bills during the COVID-19 pandemic to help their communities stay well. With regard to the recovery of the advance payments, as is normal custom and practice, the Department will negotiate this with the PSNC, taking into account the need to maintain cash flow to community pharmacies.

We are doing everything we can to provide community pharmacies with personal protective equipment (PPE). The latest PPE guidance that has been issued by Public Health England recommends sessional use of fluid-resistant surgical masks in a pharmacy setting only where social distancing of two metres from patients cannot be maintained.

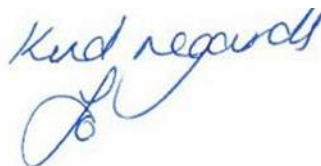
If required, further supplies of PPE can be ordered through the wholesalers and distributor networks that supply to community pharmacies. If these wholesaler routes are unable to provide sufficient PPE, pharmacists should turn to their local resilience forums (LRFs), which can provide supplies to respond to local spikes in need. LRFs will continue to receive sufficient PPE stock to support other sectors, including community pharmacies, in meeting their PPE needs.

Those pharmacies that are critically short of PPE should contact the National Supply Disruption Response team for an urgent delivery.

Ensuring the wellbeing and morale of pharmacy staff at this time is paramount. The Department has been working to increase workforce capacity and flexibility for community pharmacies, including asking those pharmacy professionals (pharmacists and pharmacy technicians) who have recently left professional registers to return.

We have also been working with the General Pharmaceutical Council, which has issued a range of guidance on how it will approach regulation during this time and stopped routine inspections, moving to visits in support of pharmacies. The Council has also suspended pharmacy professional revalidation requirements until 31 August.

The challenges faced by the health system as a result of COVID-19 have seen community pharmacy teams across the country go above and beyond to support the public, and I am immensely grateful for their amazing dedication and hard work.



JO CHURCHILL