

To: Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board

19th December 2018

Subject: NHS Prescription Ordering Direct Service

1 Purpose of the Report

1.1 To provide a briefing on the NHS Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) service that is available to 276,000 Coventry residents, registered with 40 GP Practices. This includes: -

- An update to members of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee on the development of the NHS POD service
- An overview of patient feedback received and
- Outlines the actions taken by the service to address issues raised by patients and/or Healthwatch Coventry.

2 Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Board:

Receives the report noting progress to date and action to address patient feedback.

3 Information / Background

3.1 NHS POD service in Coventry

3.1.1 NHS POD was introduced in Coventry in June 2015. It was initially developed to support a reduction in medication waste, which was estimated to be over £6 million every year. In this case waste are those medications that are prescribed and dispensed but not taken by patients and so consequently must be destroyed. What became clear during the early phases of operating the service in 2015/16 were the additional benefits of the service which included convenience for patients from reduced visits or telephone calls to their GP surgery and the reduced demand on GP reception staff and GP time.

3.1.2 The NHS POD service is a telephone/online service that takes orders for repeat medication from patients registered with participating GP practices. The repeat orders are transmitted to the GP Practice for approval electronically, and then sent on to a community pharmacist of the patient's choice for dispensing.

3.1.3 NHS POD operates 5 days a week and manages an average of 1,800 calls a day from patients in Coventry. The current service is operating at an average wait time of 59 seconds and an abandoned call rate of 8.72%. Unfortunately there has been some variability where the wait has been longer and therefore below the standard required.

3.1.4 When contacting NHS POD patients are advised of the ordering process and asked about their current stock of medications at home. As a result the service has been able to reduce stockpiling and waste of unneeded medications.

3.1.5 The service currently covers 40 practices, and 276,000 registered patients with those GP Practices using the service. Additional practices are still being added to the NHS POD service with a practice currently preparing to join in January/February 2019 that represents a patient list size of 13,500.

3.1.6 The service currently employs 45 trained call handlers on a mix of full time and part time contracts. These staff take orders for repeat medication from patients and liaise with GP Practices.

3.1.7 There are a number of benefits of the services to patients, GP practices and the CCG which include:

- **Benefits for patients**

- Provides patients with an alternative route for conveniently ordering their medication by telephone – over 95% of patients found the process easy to use (highlighted in the last patient survey of the CRCCG service).
- Empowerment of patients to take control of their own medication needs.
- Ability to order their medication from their own home or at their convenience via the telephone.
- Dedicated time and communication with a trained call handler to discuss their prescription requirements (this is a non-clinical person).
- Pharmacy nomination can be amended at each prescription request if necessary.
- Reduces stockpiling of medication (medication going out of date or safety concerns with excess medication stored in the home).

- **Benefits for the CCG**

- Potential financial savings of around 8% of the prescribing budget (when all practices are covered) equating to circa £6M.
- Improve prescribing quality through controlled adherence to medicines optimisation principles. There are potentially 270,000 prescription items dispensed to patients each year that are not required, these waste patient, carer and primary care staff time.

- **Benefits for GP practices**

- Reduced GP practice administration time of repeat prescription requests, thereby reducing overall practice workload.
- Medication review reminders given to patients whilst they are on the telephone.
- A GP has reported that they have more confidence in signing off prescription requests as the patient has been asked questions regarding what they actually need at that time.
- Reduced reception burden with community pharmacies collecting multiple paper prescriptions as POD utilises EPS.
- Increased uptake of Electronic Prescription Service (EPS).

3.1.8 Since the introduction of NHS POD the savings have been significant, as shown in the table below.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 to Nov 18
GP Practices using NHS POD	8	19 (11 full year and others joined between December and March 16/17)	30 (19 full year and rest joined throughout the year)	40
Patients eligible to use NHS POD (list size)	50,000	120,000	230,000	276,000
Number of call handlers at end of year	6	13	27	37
Total savings for the year	£67,000	£408,000	£1,400,000	£789,000 (data for Apr-Sept 18)

Note: Savings are based on the yearly reduction in the repeat prescribing costs from GP Practices who have signed up to use the NHS POD service.

3.2 Public engagement and patient feedback on the service provided.

3.2.1 The NHS POD service receives both positive and negative feedback from patients. This feedback is logged and used to inform improvements to the service.

3.2.2 One of the themes received from callers is that they do not like the fact they have to ring NHS POD every month for their medication. To address this NHS POD is trialling repeat dispensing. This is where patients can have a batch prescription authorised for a number of months, which saves them having to call NHS POD every month and they can just go to their chosen pharmacy to collect their medication. This service is only suitable for medications which are taken regularly and not for those which are “as needed” use, such as painkillers or emollient creams.

3.2.3 NHS POD has also addressed concerns that medication requests are taking longer to be processed by community pharmacies following contact with NHS POD. The service has worked closely with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) to improve communication with local pharmacies and to ensure that they have received prescriptions in a timely manner e.g. for multi compartment dosage systems

(dossette boxes). The service also now messages to inform community pharmacies of the number of items issued in a prescription to ensure that patients do not receive a delivery of only part of their prescription when there is a delay in authorisation of other items.

3.2.5 Additional to the daily patient feedback the service has been working with Healthwatch Coventry to develop additional materials which would support patients to understand and get the most out of using NHS POD.

Healthwatch reviewed the service in 2016/17 and identified the following themes of improvement from their review

- a) Opening hours for phone calls to POD
- b) Information provision to users of the service and those who become users of the service in the future
- c) Ensuring that both current and future users of POD who have hearing impairment/issues and memory issues are able to use an alternative means of re-ordering medication via their pharmacy or GP practice as POD is not appropriate for them

The service took account of these issues as set out below

Response to a) Opening hours for phone calls to POD

In November 2016 NHS POD extended its opening hours and is now open from 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday. We had conducted our own patient satisfaction survey which highlighted that all patients are not yet aware of the new hours despite call handlers informing patients on a regular basis and new information leaflets / posters were being produced. We are continuing to promote these times to patients.

Response to b) Information provision to users of the service and those who become users of the service in the future

- Patient information leaflet sent to HW for information.
- When a GP practice joins the NHS POD patients are informed of the service in various ways e.g. patient leaflets, posters in the GP surgery, GP practice sending text message to patients informing them of the new service, information on paper prescription repeat slip, information on the GP practice website, verbal communication from the GP practice, television screen in GP practice.
- In some circumstances when patient's prescriptions are managed solely by the community pharmacy, patients do not have any regular contact with the GP practice. Therefore the pharmacy will inform the patient of the change when the patient collects their repeat prescription.
- Coventry and Rugby CCG now have a section on their website about NHS POD

Response to c) Ensuring that both current and future users of POD who have hearing impairment issues and memory issues are able to use an alternative means of re-ordering medication via their pharmacy or GP practice as POD is not appropriate for them.

- NHS POD is not the only method of ordering
- Once a patient has consented to NHS POD having access to their patient records and this is recorded, a family member / carer can call up on the patient's behalf to order the prescription. This representative should have full knowledge of the patient's current medication requirements.
- If a patient needs pharmacy input to ensure that the repeat prescription is ordered then an agreement can be made with the GP practice. The pharmacy should fill in the appropriate form highlighting the reason for their input.
- Electronic repeat dispensing is a service where the GP authorises a number of prescriptions (batch) which is then available for the pharmacy to download at regular intervals. This reduces the need to reorder medication every single month. NHS POD is currently working with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee to pilot a service with one GP practice to enable NHS POD to facilitate the processing of electronic repeat dispensing prescriptions for appropriate patients. These patients should be stable on their current medication regime, stable in their medical conditions and be up to date with tests and reviews. Medication that a patient should take every day can then be issued this way.

The communication materials for patients have been improved and now include an updated patient leaflet and a series of Frequently Asked Questions targeted at patients. These documents are being finalised and will be issued in the New Year. These materials will be made available in: -

- All GP Practices who offer the NHS POD service
- Local community pharmacies
- On the CCG website
- Circulated to community groups and voluntary sector organisations who work with local residents.

A promotional campaign is planned for early 2019 to demonstrate the benefits for patients of using NHS POD.

3.3 Improvement of services since June 2018

In June 2018 there was a significant increase in the number of calls to the NHS POD service, receiving 52,118 (a 16% increase) calls. This resulted in an average wait time of 3:46 minutes and an abandoned call rate of 35%.

The CCG received complaints about the service both via email and verbally to service team leaders. The main theme of the complaints was the length of time it was taking for patients to get through to the service.

3.3.1 To address this, the CCG asked the service lead to make improvements to address the longer waits. One aspect of which was an immediate request to improve the call back service. The call back facility was improved by adding additional dedicated lines

and staff priorities for call backs as well as a new script to make it easier for patients to understand and use. The call back facility now activates after the patient has been in the queue for 3 minutes. Therefore the stats show that less people are using this facility due to not having to wait as long during September. We have also added an on-line call back request facility.

3.3.2 NHS POD also recruited additional staff to manage the increased demand and an additional 14 staff have joined the service since August 2018.

3.3.3 The average wait time and abandoned calls have reduced month on month since the implementation of the call back service and the additional staffing. In September NHS POD had an abandoned call rate of 8.72% and an average wait time of 59 seconds.

3.4 Next steps for the NHS POD service

3.4.1 The service continues to expand to cover as many GP practices in Coventry and Rugby CCG as possible.

3.4.2 There is a focus on increasing the uptake of electronic repeat dispensing for those patients who choose the service and are suitable for this service.

3.4.3 Continue working with community pharmacies to provide timely reminders to patients to order their monthly repeat prescriptions.

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