

BRIEFING PAPER FOR– Closure of NHS POD (Prescription Ordering Direct) Service

1. Background

- 1.1. In December 2023, and after consideration and engagement, the ICB decided to recommend decommissioning of the POD service on the grounds of lack of value for money. Deteriorating performance and operational difficulties were also noted. We anticipate that the POD will close on 31st March 2024.
- 1.2. We are now in a transition phase of repatriating repeat prescription ordering to GP practices, which is part of their GMS contract. Support and funding is being made available to practices to manage this transition.


2. Potential Impacts of closing the NHS POD service

Impact on patients

- 2.1. As the NHS App and Patient Access app gains in popularity, we anticipate that the majority of patients will chose to move to ordering their medications through these methods. All practices have patients using these methods already with app-based prescription ordering varying from 19-73% in those practices that use POD.
- 2.2. We recognise that digital services are not accessible to everyone however and there remain patients who would prefer to use the telephone or order their repeat prescriptions in person. There are already alternative provisions for ordering regular repeat prescriptions (paper ordering slips, telephone, email) within General Practice as this is a core GMS service which all practices deliver. This provision is usually timelier and an improvement in patient convenience as prescription ordering compared to POD.
- 2.3. Those patients who are eligible can be transferred to repeat dispensing which allows 6-12 months of prescriptions at a time to be approved with their consent.
- 2.4. There is already provision in place for community pharmacy to order repeat medication on behalf of vulnerable patients and this would continue if the POD service was no longer in place.

Impact on General Practice

- 2.5. Regardless of whether a repeat prescription is ordered via the POD service or digitally or via the practice system, GPs still have to review and sign the prescription to authorise it. This will remain the case when the POD service is closed.
- 2.6. Practices may see an increase in their administrative burden as those patients who do not choose or are not able to access digital alternatives call the practice to order their medications.



Although this is a core GMS service and is the responsibility of GPs to provide this service within the terms of their contract, we are clear that this is a time when Primary Care is already under significant pressure and the ICB is committed to supporting our GP practices to manage any potential issues.

- 2.7. Within the ICB there are a few PCNs that have independently set up medicine management hubs that, as well as repeat prescribing, provide extra services set up for their local patients and learning from these can be utilised to spread good practice across the affected stakeholders.

Impact on Pharmacy

- 2.8. Pharmacy services will not be affected if the POD service was no longer available as they would continue to receive repeat prescriptions directly from the practice, regardless of how the prescription was ordered.
- 2.9. Community pharmacy will remain able to order repeat medication on behalf of vulnerable patients with the agreement of the practice, as is the case now.

3. Transition Plan

- 3.1. We understand that the changes may cause a temporary impact to patients whilst they transition over to an alternative service. The ICB will support patients and practices during this transition to ensure that this impact is minimised as far as possible for affected patients and to raise awareness of the changes to the service.
- 3.2. From early January a message on the NHS POD website has been posted, advising patients that the NHS POD service will close by the end of March and that the patients GP practice will contact them in due course advising of how they can order their repeat medicines hereon in.
- 3.3. A recorded message has also been added to the telephone system advising every patient calling in to the NHS POD service that it will be closing at the end of March. The message also advises patients ringing in to sign up for the NHS or Patient Access app if they have not done so already. The message then advises that if the patient does not have a smartphone or access to a computer and may find it difficult to order in the future, to inform the POD call handler who will ensure the GP practice is aware of this.
- 3.4. The POD call handler on answering a call will ask the patient if they have heard the recorded message on the phone system. They will ask the patient if they have access to the NHS app or alternative online access to prescription ordering. A list of options available from their practice will be presented to the patient and the information discussed with the patient as appropriate (but advising them not to call their GP practice as the practice will in due course contact them). If a patient advises that they cannot order their prescription by the methods advised or do not have a family member (or authorised representative) that could do this for them, then their details (with the consent of the patient) will be recorded onto a 'Register of Vulnerable Patients' for each practice and these details passed to the relevant GP practice.

3.5. As patients are only issued with 28 days worth of prescription, we will have two to three opportunities to speak to each patient individually if necessary through the transition process.

3.6. The specific activities that the ICB is committed to support patients and practices are below:

Alternative Service or Mitigation	Activity
NHS App or Patient Access app	<p>The NHS App and Patient Access App are widely and freely available apps that allow patients to order their prescriptions at any time without the need to contact their practice. We will promote GP online services as the first choice for most patients</p> <p>Proxy ordering for family members is also available via the Patient Access app for those who are unable to do so themselves. This is only available if the person is registered at the same practice as the patient and this issue has been raised by the ICB to digital colleagues regionally.</p> <p>We will promote and support patients using the NHS POD to transfer to the NHS/Patient Access App where there is patient willingness to do this.</p> <p>We anticipate that more than 80% of patients would be realistically able to use this method. Many practices that use practice website or email ordering could transition to this approach that significantly reduces administration in the practice.</p>
Funding to GP practices to support transition	<p>£200,000 has been made available to practices to support the transition. This will be distributed on a fair shares basis based upon the number of patients from a practice using POD.</p> <p>Practices can use this funding to contact affected patients, update their prescription ordering processes and upskill staff as necessary.</p>
Supporting practices in alternative methods of prescription ordering	<p>We will promote repeat dispensing as described above and transfer eligible patients to this with their consent</p> <p>In-person at the practice - Patients can order their repeat prescription via the right-hand side of their repeat prescription slip and drop into their GP practice</p> <p>The POD already allows community pharmacy to order for a practices vulnerable patients and this would continue utilising the methods above</p>
POD Wind Down	<p>All non-essential activity by POD staff has now been halted and closed to new patients. The focus of activity is on the basics of prescription ordering and supporting patients in the transition.</p> <p>All patients contacting POD will be informed on the planned closure and how to transition to an alternative method of ordering.</p> <p>As the closure deadline gets closer POD will start issuing double volume prescriptions to ensure that patients have sufficient medication to cover</p>

	the early weeks in April to reduce the burden on practices during this early transition time.
Training for practice staff	The ICB medicines optimisation team will be providing training to practice staff to upskill them in prescription ordering
Identifying vulnerable patients	POD staff will identify patients that are unable to use app/web based repeat ordering to allow practices to contact them directly to agree alternatives
Identifying vulnerable practices	Practices are being asked to self identify whether they think they will be particularly challenged by the transition. We will endeavour to provide additional support to these practices where necessary
Communications support	As part of the winter campaign we will be promoting the use of the NHS app. We will be providing practices with a resource pack for communicating the POD changes with patients.

4. Conclusions

- 4.1. We are anticipating that the POD will close on 31st March. Staff are aware of this and currently in consultation.
- 4.2. POD is now closed to new patients and we have started to communicate the likely closure date when patients contact POD and encourage them to use the NHS/patient access app where possible.
- 4.3. The ICB will continue to actively engage with practices and PCNs to manage the transition over the next 3-4 months including making £200,000 available to practices to support the transition.
- 4.4. Training will be provided to all practices that require it.
- 4.5. We will continue to provide communication resources to practices to support this transition. Vulnerable patients and practices will receive enhanced support where required

Recommendation

Coventry Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee are asked to **NOTE** the information about the transition plan for the closure of the POD and repatriation of repeat prescribing to GP practices.

End of Report