

Does the key to your health care lie in the community?

Community optometrists, pharmacists and audiologists are not only major providers of health services, but also play a vital role in the wellbeing of communities, as explained below.

Eye health

- Around two million people live with sight loss in the UK, half of which could have been avoided through early intervention and diagnosis. This number is set to double to four million by 2050. (Future Sight Loss UK, RNIB 2008).
- Yet action can be taken now to address this issue by using the skills of community optometrists and dispensing opticians, who already carry out 17.5 million sight tests a year in communities across England, either through conveniently located optical practices on the high street or through domiciliary eye care service providers.
- In order to free up hospital capacity to cope with increasing demand from an ageing population, the development of new technologies, and to prevent the development of post code lotteries, community optical practices are successfully and safely delivering local enhanced services in primary care for eye conditions, such as glaucoma,

cataract, Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), diabetic retinopathy and for people with learning disabilities. Despite these community services going above and beyond the sight testing service, they are not always recognised in this way by commissioners. There is a real opportunity under the current NHS reforms for this to be transformed for the benefit of patients as part of an integrated health and social care system.

Hearing care

- Hearing Loss is a major public health issue affecting over 10 million (1 in 6 people in the UK), and by 2031 there will be more than 14.5 million people in the UK experiencing hearing loss. The World Health Organisation predicts that by 2030 adult onset hearing loss will be in the top ten disease burdens in the UK, above cataracts and diabetes.
- The good news is that, whilst capacity is a major drawback for hospital delivery, under the current NHS reforms (and in particular the 'Any Qualified Provider' (AQP) model for adult hearing loss) thousands of patients are now being seen in a community setting for their hearing needs. This reduces pressure on the hospital service and meets patient needs for both choice and access.

- The bad news is that, whilst access and choice is now a reality for some, the AQP programme has stalled leading to a postcode lottery with the new pathway not available to everyone across England. Community hearing service providers have the expertise, the capacity and the will to take the weight off the hospital service across the entire country. Clinical Commissioning Groups who have not yet taken steps to commission community hearing services should do so now to ensure equity for all.

Pharmacy

- In England the public has over 11,000 options of where, when and which pharmacy provides their pharmaceutical services. No other healthcare provider offers such instant access and choice. An estimated 1.6 million people choose to visit a community pharmacy each day and we need to work in new ways to make 'every contact count'.
- Located at the heart of our communities, pharmacists and their teams provide

expert personalised health and well-being advice. Pharmacies offer people more opportunities to take greater control over their own health. The Healthy Living Pharmacy is a new and growing model for delivering a range of screening and prevention services from community pharmacies.

- Community pharmacists are the primary source of patient and public information about medicines, the number one healthcare intervention in the NHS. Through the Medicine Use Reviews, New Medicine Service and other locally commissioned services, pharmacy is taking an enhanced role in supporting people with long-term conditions.

Please ask your Clinical Commissioning Group and Health and Wellbeing Board how they are incorporating the expanding role of pharmacy, optometry and hearing care into their plans for the local population.

About us:

For further information on community optometry and for local contact details, please contact Optical Confederation: www.opticalconfederation.org.uk/contact-us/contact-us or visit: www.opticalconfederation.org.uk

For further information on community pharmacy and for local contact details, please contact: Pharmacy Voice (info@pharmacyvoice.com, telephone: 0844 7364204 or 020 7470 8773) or visit: www.pharmacyvoice.com

For further information on community hearing care and for local contact details, please contact the National Community Hearing Association (info@the-NCHA.com or via 020 7298 5110) or the British Society of Hearing Aid Audiologists (via secretary@bshaa.com) or visit: www.the-NCHA.com and www.bshaa.com