**14 October 2016**

**New pharmacy service for emergency prescriptions and minor ailments to be rolled out**

Patients who need urgent repeat medicines will be able to go directly to community pharmacies without the need to see a GP, under new plans announced today.

Speaking at the Pharmacy Business Awards last night, Community Health and Care Minister David Mowat announced the launch of a Pharmacy Urgent Care pilot programme which is due to start in December 2016.

The move means that patients who contact NHS 111 for their urgent repeat medicines will be directed straight to community pharmacies instead of out of hours GP surgeries.

The minister also announced a new approach for referring patients with urgent minor ailments to community pharmacy to ensure people can get high-quality, timely care. NHS 111 will develop a new approach to allow them to refer patients with urgent minor ailments, such as earaches, sore throats and bites, to community pharmacy for advice and medication from skilled professionals. This scheme will be rolled out across England between December 2016 and April 2018.

These developments will provide patients with more choice and quicker access to local experts as well as making better use of the clinical skills of community pharmacists and their teams. They are also designed to cut down the 200,000 calls per year to NHS 111 for urgent repeat medication, reduce waiting times in General Practice and free up GPs who are estimated to spend nearly 40 per cent of their time advising patients on minor ailments.

NHS England will also look at the impact on A&E, where some people currently go to obtain urgent repeat prescriptions, as we look at options to better integrate community pharmacy into urgent care.

Urgent repeat prescription medicines includes asthma inhalers, insulin and painkillers.

Minor ailments are classed as self-limiting illnesses and injuries including; pain, constipation, indigestion, hay fever, sore throat, earache, colds and flu, bites and stings.

Community Health and Care Minister David Mowat said:

“Community pharmacists already contribute a huge amount to the NHS, but we are modernising the sector to give patients the best possible quality and care.

“This new scheme will make more use of pharmacists’ expertise, as well as freeing up vital time for GPs and reducing visits to A&E for urgent repeat medicines.

“This scheme is part of our drive to meet increasing demand for services - transforming how pharmacists and their teams operate in the community, and bringing clear benefits to patients and the public whilst making the best use of taxpayers’ money.”

 Keith Willett, Medical Director for Acute Care, NHS England, said:

"Directing patients to go to a community pharmacy instead of a GP or A&E for urgent repeat medicines and less serious conditions, could certainly reduce the current pressure on the NHS, and become an important part of pharmacy services in the future. This pilot will explore a sustainable approach to integrate this into NHS urgent care.”

 Keith Ridge, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, said:

“NHS England’s pilot will enable the integration of community pharmacy as a whole into the existing NHS urgent care system and to make better use of the clinical skills of community pharmacists and their teams. It is a step towards the new role for community pharmacy which we have set out where it is no longer on the sidelines but is an integral part of the NHS’s new models of patient-centred care.”

Pharmacists in West Yorkshire have already been testing a scheme to refer urgent repeat prescriptions to community pharmacists since 2014. They have had a positive impact, freeing up over 75 hours of clinical time each weekend to enable GPs to concentrate on the patients who need them. They have also seen much better results over busy periods such as bank holidays and Easter.

Pharmacists are highly qualified clinical practitioners whom patients can see immediately without an appointment. This gives patients faster access to advice from a health professional and reduces waiting times in other parts of the local health community, particularly general practice, allowing more time for the management of patients with more serious conditions.

The move comes as the Government prepares to modernise the pharmacy sector to ensure the public receives a wide range of high quality care in settings that are convenient to all, aimed at rewarding community pharmacies for providing patients with high quality services.

**Background**

NHS 111 will also remind patients to plan effectively, and that this scheme should not be used as a standard way to obtain repeat prescription medicines.