

Rt Hon Robert Buckland QC MP
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of State for Justice

7 August 2020

Dear Minister,

Assaults on emergency workers consultation

Pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and support staff are playing a vital role on the frontline against COVID-19, going above and beyond to help patients during one of the most challenging periods that has faced our health service.

While the vast majority of the public were understanding of the enormous pressures facing pharmacy teams at the height of the pandemic, I was concerned by reports of an increase in abusive and threatening behaviour against pharmacy teams, including physical assaults. This is unacceptable at any time, but particularly so when they are doing all they can to support the public.

We raised this with the National Police Chiefs Council and appreciated the dialogue with them on steps the police could take to support and offer reassurance to pharmacy teams. We also welcomed the assurance from the Department of Health and Social Care that the Assaults on Emergency Workers Act would apply to all pharmacists and their teams providing services for the NHS.

We agree with a zero-tolerance approach to any form of violent or abusive behaviour and welcome the Government's intention that frontline health and care workers have sufficient protection from the law to enable them to carry out their duties.

Sentences under the Act must provide an appropriate deterrent and I note the Police Federation has called for sentencing guidelines to include a minimum tariff for this offence. We would support tougher sentences to protect our health and care staff. While the consultation at this time is looking at increasing the maximum sentence to two years, this should be kept under review to ensure the Act is working as intended.

With ongoing pressures on the health service, it is vital that the NHS, pharmacy employers, representative bodies, the police, and Government departments continue working together to ensure pharmacists and their teams can look after patients safely.

Yours sincerely,



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