# A local lobbying toolkit for pharmacists

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## 1. What is the toolkit?

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society represents the views of members to the Government on all issues related to pharmacy: via consultation documents; formal committees and groups; in private meetings with ministers, politicians and civil servants.

There are some circumstances that require an influencing campaign to be undertaken at a local level, possibly in addition to a campaign within central government. This may be because an overwhelming response is required to affect change in a very short timescale, or because the campaign is of a local nature.

Those most suited to delivering a local campaign are members who live and work locally. An MP must listen to his/her constituents or suffer the consequences at election time. The RPS has produced this toolkit to assist LPFs and pharmacists to deliver a local campaign. With this toolkit comes the commitment to support LPFs and members wherever possible: further advice via email and the telephone; additional resources if required; personal on-site support for complex cases of those with a national perspective. Local lobbying activity can help you to build relationships and influence with your local MP, and spur them into action on behalf of pharmacy.

This generic toolkit provides the necessary material and practical guidance required to enable you to embark upon local lobbying activity.

In this toolkit you will find:

* a four-step guide to lobbying;
* information on using the local media;
* a sample letter to your MP;

The RPS is undertaking a nationally co-ordinated grass roots lobbying campaign, raising awareness of what pharmacy is and can provide as a valued member of the healthcare community.

Pharmacists working in secondary care or in primary care organisations will be more limited in how they are able to lobby on a particular issue. They will be constrained by their terms of employment and activities such as visits to workplaces would need to be agreed by their employer. They would also have to make clear that any activity they undertake is in their personal capacity and does not fall foul of their terms of employment.

However, they could make representation to their AM, MSP or MP in their personal capacity in their own time.

The Public Affairs Team at the Society will provide briefings on any centrally organised campaigns with advice and support for those making representation on behalf of our profession.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society invites all its members to participate in campaigns and help us deliver real change to people’s lives – the public and pharmacists alike. Head of Public Affairs, Charles Willis, is available to offer advice and assistance before you commence your campaign and continuing guidance and support will be given once you embark upon a campaign so please join in to help make a real difference.

#### For further information and advice, please contact:

Charles Willis,

Head of Public Affairs,

Public Affairs & Communications Directorate

Tel: 020 7572 2670

Email: [charles.willis@rpharms.com](mailto:charles.willis@rpharms.com)

## 2. At-a-glance guide

#### Choose to participate

In any lobbying campaign there is strength in numbers. The effectiveness of such a campaign depends upon the maximum number of members contributing. For those pharmacists participating in the campaign, it is important to have as much information to hand as possible before commencing. To help you with this, the RPS will provide suitable background briefing in addition to offering practical guidance throughout the process, to ensure that every participant is able to lobby as effectively as possible. The level of success of every pharmacist at a constituency level determines the overall success of the campaign at a national level.

#### Start the process

The toolkit contains templates that can be utilised to create a campaign letter, to be sent to your Member of Parliament. It also explains the process, in order to create the best possible outcome. RPS public affairs staff can help with a more bespoke letter if you require further assistance.

#### Plan for the event

There are instances when a visit by a local MP will create valuable results for a campaign. Such visits build good relationships between the MP and pharmacy in addition to generating local media coverage, Use the checklist at the end of this document to help you get the most from the MP’s visit.

#### Use the local media

The local press and radio may be interested in your lobbying activity, particularly if you are organising a pharmacy visit. The toolkit provides you with a sample press release to help you get your story into the media.

#### Where can I get advice?

The RPS will provide you with comprehensive support and advice at every stage of the process. Please contact Charles Willis, Head of Public Affairs: telephone: 0207 572 2670.

## The four steps to influence

### *Step 1*: The issue

Some pharmacists have already met their MP, either professionally or at a social event. The difference between having spoken socially to your MP and lobbying is that lobbying is a targeted and planned activity, with the aim of raising a particular issue and bringing influence to bear on the way that it is viewed and, ultimately, the way that it is resolved. Individual meetings at a constituency level are often part of a much larger, co-ordinated approach that combines several methods of engagement at specific points in a national campaign.

Meetings with MPs will be more business-like and they will expect a case to be put to them, outlining the issue: the effect it will have upon pharmacy and the public, and why they should become involved. This information will be made available by the Policy and Public Affairs teams within RPSGB.

### *Step 2*: Who to contact?

#### **Contacting your MP**

MPs represent an average of 70,000 people and receive hundreds of letters, telephone calls, e-mails and invitations every week. Most MPs have offices both in their constituency and in Westminster. They are usually required to be in Parliament from Monday to Thursday each week, throughout the year whilst Parliament is in session (which roughly coincides with school terms). Friday is spent in the constituency, giving MPs a chance to have meetings with their staff, attend local events and hold surgeries for constituents. Many MPs also make themselves available over the weekend for similar activity.

Many pharmacists will know their local MP and some will have made contact previously. If you do not know who your local MP is, the easiest way to find out is to use the MP locator service on the Parliament web-site at:

<http://www.parliament.uk/mps-lords-and-offices/mps/>

**Type the postcode of the pharmacy into the space provided and it will give you the name of the constituency MP for your area. It is important to make sure that you invite the MP in whose constituency the pharmacy is. It may be that the MP for your home is a different person.**

This service also links to contact details and biographical information about MPs. Contact with your MP can be through correspondence or in person. Correspondence is the best method of contact if you wish to maintain a process that can be traced and kept current during holidays etc. when an MP’s office may be closed.

Making contact with the MP in person is an effective way of building a good relationship and encouraging them to take up the issues you want to raise. However, it is important to make contact in a way that is timely and organised. Obviously, if a parliamentarian calls into a pharmacy to pick up a prescription, or if you bump into him/her at a local event, it may not be the best time to lobby them!

The sample letter (See section 4) provides you with a template with which to write to your MP and request that he/she visit the pharmacy to gain an understanding of the advanced services on offer. Alternatively, a short meeting, or surgery appointment could be organised by telephoning the MP’s constituency office, or Westminster office via the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000. The constituency offices for a number of MPs can be found by calling the (above) Westminster number and asking for the constituency address. If the operator does not have this number, the MP’s Westminster office will be able to assist.

It is important to seek a date and time when the MP is available for the visit or meeting, before you make arrangements with other potential participants.

#### **The local media**

The local media can be a key part of your local lobbying activity. For example, if you are meeting with your local MP, you may want to invite local press to send journalists and photographers. This has the benefit of being an added incentive for people to participate in the event, and giving local publicity to our profession. You should also make your own arrangements for a photograph, such as by taking your own digital camera. These pictures can then be emailed to local media, the pharmacy sector media, such as the PJ or C&D, and used in your own materials, such as on your website. Editors of local newspapers like to see images of a politician experiencing a service provided at the pharmacy – such as an MP having his/her blood pressure measured. Alternatively, a group photograph behind the counter with all staff is equally acceptable.

A media dimension to the event can also be a helpful way of shaping the ongoing activity and encourage the MP to engage in the issues. If, for example, the MP is participating in a media interview, he/she will want to sound knowledgeable and interested in the issues relating to pharmacy and will need to say how he/she intends to take up the issues.

In planning media contact, you need to identify all possible outlets for your story from mainstream local papers to the trade and free press, and radio and TV stations. Remember, no outlet is too small: often the free newspapers circulated in residential areas are more widely read than national dailies.

Do you have any media contacts already? Personal contacts with journalists, whether from previous coverage, family and friends or just a friendly phone call, can be the quickest way to a story. If not, identify the contact name of the right person for your type of story. This is not difficult: just looking through your local paper you will see the “by-line” of journalists next to the stories they write, and this should help you to identify who is writing on similar themes to yours.

If you are “cold-calling” a newspaper, or local radio, just ask for the name of the most relevant person to your story – such as the news editor/desk for tomorrow’s or future news stories; the features editor for longer, more discursive articles, or the picture editor for photocalls. Larger regional newspapers may have a health editor, or other specialist correspondents.

It is important to involve, and where appropriate, give prior notice to people you are involving in media activity. For example, your MP may be able to supply contact information for the local media outlets, or will be prepared to issue a press release to support your cause. The RPS Public Affairs team will help you develop a press release for publication after the event.

### Step 3: Set clear objectives

Local lobbying activity is an important opportunity to secure action and continuing support from your MP. You should prepare, in advance, a list of ways in which you want him/her to help you and then try to get their commitment.

Raising an issue with your MP:

When raising issues with your MP, you should aim to win his/her commitment to one or more of the following actions, prioritised according to the type of issue you are raising:

* to write to local decision-makers such as the council or local CCG
* to attend a further meeting, or event, with you
* to write to the Secretary of State for Health to highlight the issues you have raised
* to accompany you on a visit to a local pharmacy to observe a practice development or witness an issue
* to table a Parliamentary Question, either an Oral Parliamentary Question, at health question time, which takes place every four weeks when Parliament is sitting, or a Written Parliamentary Question which can be tabled at any time.
* to join the All-Party Pharmacy Group which is open to all Westminster MPs and Peers.

The Public Affairs team will be able to provide you with additional guidance on these points, as well as a further briefing document outlining the issues that you should look to raise.

If you are involving the media, you should consider what photo opportunities there will be (ie who will be available for photographing where, and what they will be doing) and how this relates to the issues you are raising with the participants. You would need to explain what makes for a good photo opportunity.

### *Step 4:* Review and develop activity

Once you have embarked upon local lobbying activities, it is important to take stock and review how successful it has been and how you can build on this activity. The contacts you have made can become a long term “network of influence” that you can use to reinforce your current lobby and to use with future issues that you wish to lobby on.

For follow up contact activity to be successful, you should refresh your messages and style. For example, a local MP is likely to be more receptive to your request for a meeting if you suggest that you are keen to update him/her, and to thank them for their efforts. However, if it appears that there has been little progress and that the meeting will only serve to repeat your previous communications, the MP is unlikely to wish to meet you again at this point.

The Public Affairs Team would be pleased to offer support on how to develop local campaign activity that can be utilised as part of a national campaign.

It is obviously very important to thank people for their time in corresponding and meeting with you and to recognise their efforts made on your behalf.

## 4a. Sample MP letter

[MR/MS X Y MP]

[CONSTITUENCY OFFICE ADDRESS]

[DATE]

[HAND-WRITE SALUTATION: DEAR MR/MS X]

As a constituent of yours, I am writing to highlight the work being carried out at [NAME] Pharmacy in [LOCATION], and to invite you to visit us – both to highlight the range of health services now available for your constituents, and to discuss pharmacy’s potential to make further cost-effective improvements to local NHS healthcare.

Should you wish to take up this invitation, please do not hesitate to contact me on [PHONE NUMBER] or [EMAIL ADDRESS].

Your support would be invaluable, and I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

[SIGNATURE]

[NAME, POST-NOMINALS]

## 4b. Sample Press Release

Local MP, [MP’s NAME], had his/her blood pressure taken today during a visit to [X,Y,Z] pharmacy, [ADDRESS/LOCATION].

[MPs NAME] visited the pharmacy and met pharmacist, [YOUR NAME], to discuss the growing number of services available from pharmacies, previously only available from a GP’s surgery. These services are expected to include: smoking cessation, obesity management, prescribing repeat prescriptions and managing long-term conditions such as diabetes.

[MP’s NAME] commented: “I’m pleased I popped in to my local pharmacy and received the all-clear on my [BLOOD PRESSURE TEST/ETC]. I’m impressed that these services are now available within the community at a time convenient to patients. I’m also pleased this initiative will free doctors up to deal with those cases that deserve more of their time. All round this is a huge step forward in the standard of care available to the public.”

The new service is available from [X,Y,Z] pharmacy after [AREA] CCG commissioned … services from … in order to address concerns over … condition(s).

For further information, please contact [NAME]

### Things to remember

#### **Check before posting or releasing**

Remember to check with the MP’s office before attributing any statements to them, and this includes social media as well. While they may have said “no brainer” or “damned silly if we didn’t”, they may prefer another form of words on paper or in the public domain.

#### **Always write to say thank you after the event**

They will appreciate the message and it will ensure that a good relationship is maintained, which is vital to achieving long term goals.