

Eluned Morgan AS/MS
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Russell George MS Chair,
Health and Social Care Committee

SeneddHealth@senedd.wales

28 July 2023

Dear Russell,

Thank you for your letter of 4 July regarding the introduction of the Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) in Wales.

The Welsh Government is investing a record level of funding in the community pharmacy sector and community pharmacies in Wales receive considerably more NHS funding per pharmacy than in any other part of the UK. Our reforms to NHS contractual arrangements mean pharmacies here now receive significant income for providing an increasing range of additional clinical services. These services, including Wales' national pharmacist independent prescribing service, are ensuring we realise the benefits of pharmacists training and expertise, take pressure off GPs and other NHS services, and improve access to high quality care for people across Wales. Importantly, our reforms are helping to create a sustainable future for community pharmacies built around better use of pharmacists training, expertise and accessibility.

Our reforms will mean in future more people use pharmacies because they provide prompt access to a range of healthcare services ensuring the sector is not dependent on footfall from people having their prescriptions dispensed. The reforms also mean the record levels of contractual funding are guaranteed, even if the number of prescriptions dispensed by pharmacies in Wales should decrease following the introduction of EPS.

The cross-border flow of prescriptions is important for many people and in particular those who live and use pharmacies near the border with England. The introduction of EPS in Wales will mean in future, people can nominate any pharmacy in Wales or England to dispense their prescription. This may result in a change to the way in which some people's prescriptions are dispensed.

Some people in Wales who do not currently do so, may choose to have their prescriptions dispensed by pharmacies in England and some people in England may choose to have their prescriptions dispensed at pharmacies in Wales. The roll out of EPS therefore creates a level playing field for pharmacies in Wales by providing an opportunity for them to

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

Canolfan Cyswllt Cyntaf / First Point of Contact Centre:
0300 0604400

Gohebiaeth.Eluned.Morgan@llyw.cymru
Correspondence.Eluned.Morgan@gov.wales

Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

dispense prescriptions from patients whose care is provided by GPs or NHS Trusts in England.

I understand there are concerns amongst some pharmacy contractors in regard to the sustainability of the pharmacy network here following the introduction of EPS. However, I am unaware of any evidence demonstrating that Distance Selling Pharmacies (DSPs) have an adverse impact on the overall provision of pharmacy services which are open to the public and the evidence is that even after 20 years, DSPs dispense only a small percentage of all prescriptions in England. A recent report by the Company Chemists' Association found more than 70% of DSPs dispense more than 50% of their prescriptions to patients from a single postcode area located within 10 miles of the pharmacy. This suggests very few DSPs in England will be interested in dispensing prescriptions for patients in Wales. Should Welsh patients wish to use a DSP they will, unless they have a valid exemption, be required to pay prescription charges and may also incur postage and packaging costs even if they are exempt from prescription charges.

Our continued investment in community pharmacies is ensuring pharmacies continue to operate on high streets in every part of Wales. Between 2015/16 and 2021/22 the number of pharmacies in Wales decreased by just four (from 716 to 712) a reduction of 0.6%. Over the same period in England, the number of pharmacies (excluding DSPs) decreased by 675 (from 11,822 to 11,147) a reduction of 5.7%. The additional closures referred to by Community Pharmacy Wales (CPW) relate specifically to a UK wide commercial decision by the owners of Lloyds Pharmacy to exit the market. Many of these pharmacies have been acquired by other pharmacy contractors and we cannot speculate as to what will happen to those that have not yet been sold. It is inappropriate to suggest a commercial decision taken by one contractor is indicative of a wider problem with the pharmacy market in Wales, and for CPW to selectively use these data to imply inaccurately the rate of closures in Wales is 'higher than in England'.

Lastly, we are helping pharmacies implement innovative solutions to improve efficiency and patient experience. We are also investing £893,000 in the [Pharmacy Innovation Fund](#) which will provide funding for Pharmacy system suppliers to improve the way IT systems in Pharmacies in Wales operate, providing opportunities for pharmacies to become more efficient – for example, introducing notifications through the NHS Wales App of a prescription being ready, meaning staff do not have to field as many calls asking whether a prescription is ready for collection.

The Electronic Prescription Service will improve the experiences of patients in Wales who have medicines prescribed, by making the transfer of information between their GP and pharmacy of their choice seamless and immediate. Approximately 50,000 prescriptions issued each month by Welsh GP's are dispensed by pharmacies and appliance contractors in England. Restricting the cross-border flow of prescriptions would prevent these patients from realising the benefits of EPS, specifically disadvantaging people who use English pharmacies now, and in particular, those who live close to the English border.

Yours sincerely



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