



Pharmacy at the heart of the health system

Pharmacies have always been open, available and active, **Ornella Barra**, Co-Chief Operating Officer, Walgreens Boots Alliance, says, and this is proving vital to health systems during the pandemic...

The welcoming lights of a pharmacy sitting at the heart of a community have always been a reassuring sight for our customers. This was never truer than during lockdown. When hospitals were being overwhelmed with COVID-19 cases and doctors' surgeries were largely closed to the public, community pharmacies remained open and available.

Pharmacy's ability to support patients whatever the circumstance has been vital to health systems during the pandemic. Being open has elevated our profile. Embracing innovation and new ways of working has enabled us to support more patients and adapt to the new normal we find ourselves in.

While remote consultation services are proving popular with some patients – and it is pleasing to see pharmacists adapt to new ways of working – they are not the answer for everyone. Pharmacies have seen an increasing number of people turning to them for advice with serious health conditions, as well as the more common issues we are used to dealing with.

The impact of COVID-19 on different communities has shown how much good health and wellbeing matters. It can really mean the difference between life and death. Pharmacies now have the perfect

opportunity to show how having health hubs embedded in local communities can make a real difference to individuals and the wider population.

Prevention is better than cure, and a proactive approach to better health pays dividends in the long run. Community pharmacists are not just a trusted source of advice, they are also a trusted source of products that people can use to help achieve their goals. We can help them stop smoking, lose weight, and treat the aches and pains of exercising.

Administering flu vaccinations is another way pharmacists can support public health as winter approaches. With more Governments now enabling this (see pages 2-3), our skills and accessibility are being recognised. We also expect pharmacies to play a role in testing, which is equally important during the COVID-19 era.

When looking at life through the COVID-19 lens, we can see how much has changed in a relatively short time. Moving forward is our only option. The trust of our customers, reinforced by being open and available when they most needed it, will be our guiding light.

Ornella



Celebrating pharmacists on a global scale

Since its creation, the EPF has promoted the pharmacy profession as an essential provider of healthcare across Europe.

Helping to bring attention to the powerful role that pharmacy has played throughout the pandemic, Walgreens Boots Alliance celebrated World Pharmacists Day on Friday 25 September.

Each division across WBA held a series of activities that showcased the invaluable contribution that pharmacists have made to meet the changing needs of their communities.

Sharing her support and appreciation, **Ornella Barra**, Co-Chief Operating Officer, WBA, says:

“Pharmacists have always been at the heart of the health system, and now they serve on the frontline of a global pandemic. During these critical times, their resilience, sense of duty, and passion for the profession has made a profound difference to so many lives. This has been recognised across the Walgreens Boots Alliance family on World Pharmacists Day.

I would like to share my deepest appreciation and admiration to all our pharmacists. As we move forward, we must continue to be the beacon of support that drives the health and wellbeing of our communities.”

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United Kingdom



Pharmacists allowed to provide services by video

Community pharmacies in England will be allowed to conduct medicines reviews with patients by phone or video consultation without having to seek prior approval, following changes to make services 'COVID-safe' at the start of September.

While some services could already be provided by telephone, including follow-up calls after a patient was prescribed a new medicine, these changes allow entire services to be provided by video, as long as the patient consents and the conversation cannot be overheard by others (unless specified by the patient). Video calls will also be allowed for annual reviews of medicines or appliances.

Pharmacists providing the services are also permitted to be based outside of the pharmacy, and verbal consent will be accepted in place of written consent. This will allow those who are shielding or isolating to continue providing clinical services.

Source: PSNC, September 2020

The Netherlands



New pricing system to start this Autumn

The new maximum wholesale price of authorised medicinal products (Wgp), which was adopted at the end of 2019, will be implemented from 1 October 2020.

In this new system, Norway will replace Germany as one of the countries of reference used to determine the prices of medicines in the Netherlands. The other countries included in the pricing "basket" are Belgium, France and the United Kingdom. By replacing Germany with Norway, the Dutch Ministry of Health (MoH) aims to reduce prices on medicinal products used for outpatient treatment.

It was also announced that the price reduction will be limited to a maximum of 10%, and products with a yearly turnover below EUR 1 million in the Netherlands can request to be kept the current system.

Source: Global Legal Insights, August 2020

France



New oncology support service

French pharmacists can now provide support to patients taking oral oncologic treatment. The service aims to coordinate regular check-ins with patients to improve the detection of iatrogenic effects, and better monitor their compliance with treatment.

Pharmacists are able to meet regularly with their patient over two years, with three interviews in the first year and two interviews in the following year. The cycle of treatment can be amended if it changes during its course, and pharmacists are paid by the national insurance system for all the interviews being carried out, regardless of the treatment's variation.

The number of patients receiving cancer treatment by oral chemotherapy has been steadily increasing since the early 2000s and now concerns 150,000 patients. Adherence to treatment is critical as its effectiveness is compromised if the compliance threshold is below 80%.

Source: Les Echos Études, October 2019

Spain



Spain has the largest network of pharmacies in the EU

Research published by the Spanish General Council of Pharmacists has shown that Spain has the largest network of pharmacies in Europe. In 2019, 70 new pharmacies opened in the country: 35% were located in the provincial capitals and 65% in other municipalities.

With approximately 75,000 registered pharmacists in Spain, 53,000 work in over 22,000 pharmacies. There is also an average of more than 2,000 citizens per pharmacy, which is one of the highest ratios in Europe.

During the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, Spanish pharmacists supported 30 million citizens and helped relieve pressures on the national health system.

Source: América Retail, August 2020

Germany



New flu vaccination pilot

This autumn, the German Pharmacist Association, DAV/ABDA, is coordinating a pilot to allow community pharmacists to administer the flu vaccination. The AOK insurance fund, a provider of statutory health insurance covering the territory of North Rhine-Westphalia and Hamburg, concluded negotiations with representatives from four regions in the north-west of the country.

A curriculum has been developed and pharmacists will have to undergo specific training to be allowed to vaccinate. Community pharmacies will also need to have suitable premises to take part in the project. German pharmacists will receive c. 12.60 euros net for each flu injection, with the price of the vaccine invoiced separately.

Source: le Quotidien du pharmacien, July 2020

Romania



Flu vaccination pilot in pharmacies

The Romanian College of Pharmacists has led Government discussions regarding the draft of a ministerial order, which will enable pharmacists to administer flu vaccinations. The current Pharmacy Law allows pharmacists to vaccinate in community pharmacies under certain conditions, but these have to be established by a ministerial order.

Discussions between the college and policy-makers have taken place to coordinate the launch of a pilot project that will implement a flu vaccination programme in community pharmacies.

The Pharmacist Association is also in discussion with the Carol Davila University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Bucharest to develop a training program for pharmacists that will start in October 2020. The College is also advocating for the recognition of pharmaceutical services in general.

Source: Romanian College of Pharmacists, 2020

Italy



A 6 percent increase in pharmaceutical expenditure in 2019

The "2019 Report on the use of Medicines in Italy" has shown that the total pharmaceutical expenditure represented 30.8 billion euros. This is an increase of 5.8% compared to the previous year.

1,604.5 doses of medicines per 1000 inhabitants were consumed every day, which represents a rise of 2% compared to 2018. Per capita, pharmaceutical expenditure amounted to €384.43, with 72% of these being paid by the national health system and the remaining 28% being purchased directly by patients.

About 7 out of 10 citizens, and more women (71%) than men (62%), received at least one prescription drug last year. Per capita, expenditure and consumption also increased with age: the over 64 population was responsible for over 60% of the expenditure and absorbs about 70% of the doses.

Sources: il Farmacista, August 2020

Turkey



Women's leadership workshops for pharmacists

This summer, the Women Pharmacists Working Group within the Turkish Pharmacists Association (TEB) held the first two meetings from its Women Leaders Academy training.

The workshops were organised on an online platform, which provided interactive sessions for pharmacists to join. The topics of discussion focused on gender inequality, managing stereotypes in a business context, invisible barriers in women-dominated occupational areas, and developing inclusive and transformative leadership issues.

Source: TEB, 2020

Portugal



Pulmonologists want more pharmacies to vaccinate

In light of the pandemic, the Portuguese Lung Foundation has called for the national network of Portuguese pharmacies to play a more active role in administering the flu vaccination to users of the national health service (SNS).

The foundation believes community pharmacists are able to perform more complex and demanding tasks, and has advised they anticipate the start of the flu vaccination campaign in early October.

It also shared concerns that the number of flu vaccines available in Portugal may be insufficient. The national health service (SNS) has made 2 million doses available, while there are over 2.2 million people over the age of 65 with a formal indication to be vaccinated.

Source: Revista saúde, August 2020

Czech Republic



Reform of the remuneration system

The Czech Wholesalers Association (AVEL) and the Chamber of Czech Pharmacists (ČLNK) are currently negotiating a proposal to reform their current common remuneration system.

Wholesalers would like a scheme that includes a digressive margin, with a combination of fixed fee and variable margins, whereas pharmacists would prefer to receive a dispensation fee alongside a variable margin.

While the negotiations between AVEL and ČLNK were slowed down by the COVID-19 pandemic, a meeting with the Ministry of Health is likely to take place in October 2020.

Source: AVEL, 2020

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This newsletter is published on behalf of the European Pharmacists Forum by:

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Highlights from the 59th EPF Seminar, 2020

For the first time in its 20 year history, the 59th European Pharmacists Forum took place virtually on 23 June 2020. Bringing together leading pharmacists across Europe, the meeting was an opportunity to reflect on the key issues affecting the pharmacy sector, and discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the profession.



Ornella Barra, Co-Chief Operating Officer, Walgreens Boots Alliance, opened the day by sharing her appreciation for independent pharmacists following their contributions during the pandemic. This unprecedented health crisis has again shown that pharmacists are the most accessible and trusted healthcare professionals.

Philippe Gaertner (France) spoke of the continued impact of COVID-19 and how community pharmacists have been empowered to offer new services, including renewing prescriptions for chronic patients, replacing medical devices, and offering telehealth. With less patients visiting doctors' surgeries, remote consultations have proven popular as they are fully reimbursed by the health system.

Jiří Hromada (Czech Republic) highlighted that while Czech pharmacies have remained open throughout the pandemic, business has dropped year-on-year. Despite highlighting a lack of consideration from public authorities towards pharmacies, he praised the solidarity in the community, the flexibility of the pharmacy sector, and the launch of new pharmacy process and services.

Walter Taeschner (Germany) explained that new regulations have been introduced to facilitate better access to medicines, with pharmacies experiencing improved courier services and a greater appreciation from the public. Recent challenges have included increased online sales, bottlenecks in the supply chain, and shortages in PPE.

Costantino Gigliotti (Italy) commended Italian pharmacists for protecting their colleagues and customers, and driving

the use of e-prescriptions and home delivery. Despite expressing concern over an impending economic downturn, the essential role of pharmacy has been strengthened by streamlined bureaucratic procedures and the return of some medicines to pharmacies.

Ana Cristina Gaspar (Portugal) explained that although pharmacies recorded a drop in volume and value during May and June, they have now become the main suppliers of PPE. Credit was also introduced to allow customers access to the products they need, with many pharmacies now offering home deliveries. Some community pharmacies are now stocking specialty products that were previously only available through hospitals.

Razvan Prisada (Romania) said that adaptability has been key during the pandemic. He has seen an acceleration of digital services, including online consultations, e-prescriptions, the reinvention of click & collect, the development of e-commerce, and home deliveries.

Toni Torres (Spain) stated that, amid a fall in sales, community pharmacies have adapted well. COVID-19 has strengthened the role of pharmacy with new teleconsultation and e-prescription services, as well as new protocols for home care services, chronic patient care, and advice for minor ailments.

Frank Bruggeman (The Netherlands) celebrated the improved public opinion of pharmacists, multichannel deliveries, telehealth, and the increase in elderly patients using digital services. He also noted a decline in patient health due

to a reluctance to visit a GP, and Europe's dependence on China and India to supply products and PPE.

Mehmet Şahin (Turkey) explained how chronic patient medicines have now been made available directly from pharmacies without prescription, and that new therapeutic protocols have emerged during the pandemic. With e-commerce and digitalisation growing exponentially, pharmacists must become more familiar with teleconsultations.

Jay Patel (UK) highlighted how consumers are prioritising local buying, e-commerce and online services, with a rise in e-prescriptions and contactless payments. During lockdown, changes to infrastructure allowed for remote consultations and improved digital services, while a number of volunteers were recruited to help manage deliveries.

Juan Guerra, SVP Managing Director International Wholesale, WBA, paid tribute to the vital role of independent pharmacies across Europe during the pandemic, and congratulated them on meeting these challenges during unprecedented circumstances.

Ornella Barra, highlighted four accelerated consumer trends in health and wellbeing, sustainability, buying local, and digital commerce.

She also recognised Walgreens Boots Alliance as being at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. As Walgreens and Boots continue to support COVID-19 testing, wholesalers and pharmacies are now recognised as a strategic resource by health systems.



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