

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Primary Care Working Group Update on Community Pharmacy Issues 1st September 2023

Since the issue of pharmacy closures was brought to the overview and scrutiny committee on 2nd May, two papers have been considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board, the original one on May 11th and the update on August 11th 2023 (attached). Since the August Health and Wellbeing board meeting, news of further pharmacy closures and reductions in opening hours continue, not just in Northumberland but nationally.

Responsibility for the pharmacy contract is now with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) which has set up a working group including Northumberland's PH Pharmacy Advisor. This development gives us confidence about engagement and communications.

Blyth

Boots have given notice that they intend to close the pharmacy in Blyth Health centre in mid-October and move the work to their other stores in Blyth, in Maddison Street and Waterloo Road. Both shops are within 10 minutes' walk of the health centre as are two other community pharmacies in Blyth town centre. Boots have also reduced the opening hours of the Maddison Street branch from 100 hours per week to 72 hours per week and will now be open from 9am to 9pm Monday to Friday but closing earlier on Saturday and Sunday. This will give a reduction in pharmacy opening hours equivalent to the loss of one and a half pharmacies.

When the health centre was opened 35 years ago, a consortium of all the pharmacies in the town had shares in the health centre pharmacy, but these have gradually been bought out by Boots. The pharmacy dispenses in excess of ten thousand prescription items per month. The pharmacy also provides a range of additional services including blood pressure monitoring, emergency contraception, Urinary tract infection treatment, regional minor ailment scheme and supplies drugs for end-of-life care.

The pharmacy works closely with GP services, and with Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust to manage patient medication within the community hospital and the health centre clinics. It provides these patients with monitored dosage boxes on discharge from the community hospital and arranges ongoing care with the Boots branch in Waterloo Road.

Prudhoe

Boots have given notice that it will be closing the smaller of its two branches in Prudhoe, from mid-October. Assurances have been given that the workload of the smaller branch can be accommodated, by transfer of staff and the outsourcing of some repeat dispensing to Boots hub in Preston. Services such as opiate supervision are in the process of being transferred between the branches. Patients can also access pharmacy services in Wylam and Stocksfield.

Ashington

One of the 100 hour pharmacies in Ashington (Asda) has given notice of its intention to reduce opening hours to 72 hours per week, and will therefore close at 9pm.

Kingston Park (Newcastle)

Boots has reduced the opening hours at its “midnight” pharmacy which is now closing at 9pm every evening, and 5pm on Sundays.

There are rumours of other pharmacies in Northumberland either going into receivership or being put up for sale as the financial crisis in community pharmacy funding continues.

Recommendation

OSC PCWG is recommended to note the current position and Northumberland’s involvement in the ICB working group

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