

# THINKPHARMACY

# EARLY CANCER DETECTION SERVICE



## Your health challenge

- There are around 363,000 new cancer cases in the UK every year – more than 990 every day;<sup>1</sup>
- Around four in ten cancer cases every year could be prevented largely through lifestyle changes;<sup>1</sup>
- Around 200,000 people with cancer in England are living in the most deprived areas of the country;<sup>2</sup> and
- Surveys have shown that people aren't necessarily aware that certain risk factors are linked to cancer<sup>3</sup>



## How can community pharmacies help?

Community pharmacy offers a broad network of accessible and conveniently located healthcare settings which can easily reach members of the community to raise awareness of cancer. This will have demonstrable benefits to primary care, secondary care, and the quality of patients' lives if cancer diagnoses can be detected from this setting.

Early diagnosis of cancer activities in community pharmacy fit into two broad types of activities; raising awareness of cancer, and cancer screening programmes to identify high risk individuals, and where appropriate, advising them to see their GP or referring them on to secondary care for diagnostic tests.<sup>4</sup>

People may present at community pharmacies with 'red flag' cancer symptoms and may not be aware that such symptoms require prompt referral.

A study of 33 pharmacies in Northern England reported 642 patients presenting with cancer alarm symptoms over a six-month period; the most common was a cough lasting longer than three weeks, followed by unexplained dyspepsia for more than three weeks.<sup>4</sup>

1. Cancer Research UK website, *Cancer Statistics for the UK* (Accessed June 2019)  
2. Macmillan Cancer Support website, *200,000 people with cancer living in deprivation* (Accessed June 2019)  
3. Cancer Research UK website, *Can cancer be prevented?* (Accessed June 2019)

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### What the experts say

"Pharmacists can identify and engage with people at a point when they wouldn't consult their GP. This could lead to earlier diagnosis of lung cancer, which means that those people are more likely to be successfully treated."<sup>5</sup>

**Rebecca Taylor, ACE programme's lead for Pharmacy**

"Many of the pharmacies taking part in the pilot are in more deprived areas...which have higher than average rates of smoking-related ill health, including lung cancer. There is arguably greater potential to identify undiagnosed lung cancer or other conditions such as COPD in the local population who visit those pharmacies."<sup>5</sup>

**Rebecca Taylor, ACE programme's lead for Pharmacy**

"We already have some clinical training and make decisions that will make a difference for patients on a daily basis."<sup>5</sup>

**Pharmacist**

4. Cancer Research UK, Macmillan & NHS England – *Pharmacy Training for early diagnosis of cancer, the Accelerate, Coordinate, Evaluate Programme* (2017)  
5. Cancer Research UK blog, *Jumping the queue: could pharmacists help spot cancer?* (2015)

For further details, please email [info@cpwy.org](mailto:info@cpwy.org).

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## Potential benefits of a community pharmacy early cancer detection service

### 1. Community pharmacy is highly accessible

The number of patient contacts each day through community pharmacy exceeds those elsewhere in primary care. Often, they are visited by people even when they are in good health – including ‘apparently well’ people. An estimated 95% of people visit a pharmacy at least once a year.<sup>6</sup> Community pharmacy teams are ideally placed to offer public health advice and support, and to ‘make every contact count’.

### 2. Conveniently located where people live, work and shop

Community pharmacy has a greater density in the most deprived areas. Community pharmacies are highly accessible locations; research has shown that 89.2% of the overall population and 99.8% of people from the most deprived areas live within just a 20-minute walk of a community pharmacy.<sup>7</sup> This is consistently higher when compared with the population living within a 20-minute walk of a GP practice.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Target hard-to-reach groups

Community pharmacies are accessible to vulnerable patients and populations, with many located in deprived areas and communities. This means they can more easily access some groups of people. Pharmacy teams may also come into contact with people who are not registered with GP practices or accessing other health services.

### 4. Healthy Living Pharmacies (HLPs) can help raise awareness on healthy lifestyle

With over 9,500 accredited HLPs in England, trained and experienced staff are ideally placed to reach out to local populations and offer public health advice. HLPs frequently engage in public health promotion campaigns, many of which are directly targeted at cancer, for example, the Be Clear on Cancer campaigns, safety in the sun, or indirectly such as Stoptober and Dry January. Each HLP has a trained Health Champion who is ready to advise and signpost patients to relevant resources.

## How might your local service work?

Pharmacies are highly accessible even to deprived population groups who may not engage with other parts of the health system, and may therefore be less likely to have their cancer picked up early by their GP or other organisation.

Medicines Counter Assistants (MCAs) are often the first people to interact with patients who present at the pharmacy to ask for advice on minor ailments or to purchase over-the-counter medicines. MCAs could receive specific training in recognising key red flag symptoms that may require referral to the pharmacist.<sup>5</sup>

They can be particularly alert to people who<sup>5</sup>:

- regularly or repeatedly purchase medicines to treat a cough or dyspepsia, or smoking cessation products; or
- ask for advice about a cough, painkillers, or nutritional supplements; or
- collect prescriptions for inhalers.

6. Royal Society of Public Health, *Reducing premature mortality: the role of community pharmacists* (2015)

7. Todd et al. *The positive pharmacy care law: an area-level analysis of the relationship between community pharmacy distribution, urbanity and social deprivation in England*, (2014)

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The pharmacist will then speak to the patient, and if needed, have the mechanism to refer the patient directly to the hospital for further testing and assessment. This would avoid the need for the patient to make and wait for an appointment with their GP and speed up the referral process.

This would also ensure that people who are less likely to visit their GP or are not registered with a GP (for example, homeless people) are identified and get the care they need at an earlier stage, before their symptoms become advanced.

The patient would then be seen at a local hospital or clinic, with whom there has been a prior agreement, and informed of the outcome. The patient’s GP will also receive a notification from the pharmacy that they have been referred, and from the hospital after further assessments have been completed.

8. Todd A et al, *Access all areas? An area-level analysis of accessibility to general practice and community pharmacy services in England by urbanity and social deprivation*, (2015)

9. Cancer Research UK website, *Why is early diagnosis important?* (Accessed June 2019)

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