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Dear Colleagues,

Joint communication from the UK Chief Pharmaceutical Officers and the Chief Executives of the GPhC and PSNI

We are writing to thank you for continuing to provide vital health services and person-centred care to patients and the public at a time of significant pressures.

The past few years have been incredibly challenging for everyone working in pharmacy, and in health and social care. During the COVID-19 pandemic, pharmacy professionals and teams played a critical role in caring for patients and the public and supporting the NHS and social care services, in each country of the UK.

We know that everyone working in pharmacy is continuing to experience high and sustained demands and pressures, and exceptional challenges such as Group A streptococcus infections, during this very busy winter period.

Whether you are providing direct care, supporting colleagues, or leading services and teams, we know your contribution is making a major difference for the communities we serve. We want to express our gratitude for your continued professionalism and hard work, and your efforts to provide the best possible services to patients and the public.

It's clear that there will be further challenges ahead over the coming weeks and months and that this pressure is likely to be exacerbated by staff shortages due to sickness or caring responsibilities. We recognise that the impact on pharmacy teams both personally and professionally will be significant and potentially prolonged throughout the coming months.

Working together

We recognise you may have to make some difficult decisions in the months ahead as you deal with the pressures you may face.

Please use your professional judgement to assess and mitigate risk, and to deliver safe and effective care for your patients. Your decisions should be informed by the regulators' standards for pharmacy professionals and for registered pharmacy premises. These standards are designed to be adaptable and to provide a framework for decision-making in a wide range of situations.

In these challenging times, we understand you may be worried that concerns could be raised with the regulator about your practice. We want to reassure you that in the unlikely event that you are referred to your regulator, they will consider the context you were working in at the time, including factors relating to the environment in which you were working and all relevant resources, guidelines, or protocols.

We also expect employers, educational supervisors, professional bodies and national health and social care organisations to take the challenging situations you may be facing into account.

We would urge you to continue to work closely with colleagues in other local pharmacy services, the wider multi-disciplinary team and with local leadership and NHS commissioning bodies, to make sure patients get access to care and to the medicines they need, when they need them. This cooperation and partnership working will be vitally important over the coming months.

Responding to concerns about abuse

We are continuing to hear worrying reports of pharmacy teams experiencing abuse and even violence from members of the public. Any abuse of pharmacy staff is completely unacceptable and robust action should be quickly taken in response to any incidents, including by law enforcement.

We would ask pharmacy owners to consider whether there are any further steps they could take to reduce the risk of staff experiencing abuse or violence, and to support staff who may experience this.

We will continue to work closely with professional bodies and local and national health and social care organisations to consider what more we can all do to try to prevent abuse or violence.

The latest [NHS Staff Respect toolkit and assets](#) for use in healthcare settings are now available on the [Campaign Resource Centre](#). The materials encourage patients to treat NHS staff with respect by 'social norming' this behaviour. The pre-populated assets feature NHS staff working in NHS settings including [general practice](#), [pharmacy](#) and [secondary care \(hospitals\)](#) across England and carry the message 'We are here to help

you. Thank you for treating us with respect'. The assets are part of a package of measures designed to help and support NHS staff, which includes wellbeing resources and support for managing patients.

Supporting your wellbeing

We know your first concern will be the care of patients and people using your services. Please also make sure you take care of your own well-being, and the well-being of your colleagues, during this time. Please seek support from your employer if you need it, you can also visit the NHS websites in each country to find out about what support is available to help you protect your health and well-being.

Finally, we would like to thank you again for your ongoing hard work to provide the best possible care for patients and the public.

Yours sincerely,



Andrew Evans

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Wales



Cathy Harrison

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Northern Ireland



Trevor Patterson

Chief Executive
Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland



Duncan Rudkin

Chief Executive
General Pharmaceutical Council



Alison Strath

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for Scotland



David Webb

Chief Pharmaceutical Officer for England