

11 August 2021

Dear colleague

## **Patient safety concerns relating to online prescribing services**

We are writing to ask you to share a message with your members and networks about patient safety concerns relating to pharmacies dispensing medicines prescribed by EEA prescribers working alone or for online prescribing services.

We are doing this as part of our more anticipatory, proportionate and tailored approach to regulation, so you are alerted to the issues we have found and can play an important role in helping drive improvements in the quality of pharmacy services.

We are continuing to identify serious patient safety concerns relating to registered pharmacies dispensing prescription-only medicines **from prescribers based in the EEA** working alone or for **third-party online prescribing services**.

Since April 2019, we have taken **enforcement action against over 40 pharmacies** linked to their provision of online pharmacy services. The majority of these pharmacies were working with online prescribing services that were prescribing medicines which are liable to abuse, misuse and overuse to people, on the basis of an online questionnaire.

Our inspections found that our standards were not being met and our guidance on providing pharmacy services at a distance was not being followed. This meant the dispensing pharmacies did not adequately safeguard vulnerable people who may be trying to obtain medicines which are not clinically appropriate for them. This puts patients at risk of serious harm or death.

We have taken swift and robust enforcement action against these pharmacies and the pharmacists involved have been referred for a Fitness to Practise investigation. We are continuing to act quickly on intelligence we receive relating to online pharmacy services and will take further action where needed to protect patients.

## **Action to take**

Pharmacy owners, superintendent pharmacists and pharmacists must make sure that they are meeting our standards and following **our guidance on providing pharmacy services at a distance, including on the internet**, if they are involved in any online pharmacy services.

We recognise that many of your members will be already doing so, but there is a significant minority of pharmacies and pharmacy professionals who are not meeting our standards and following our guidance at all times. These pharmacies and pharmacy professionals could face enforcement actions and sanctions against their registration.

It is important to emphasise that it is not enough to meet legal requirements only relating to EEA prescriptions. Pharmacy professionals are responsible for ensuring all medicines they supply are clinically appropriate for patients.

**Please ask your members to review the guidance on providing pharmacy services at a distance now** and ensure that the safeguards outlined in the guidance are in place, including particular safeguards that are necessary when working with a prescriber and/or prescribing service based outside the UK.

We publish inspection reports and details of enforcement action we have taken against pharmacies on **our inspections website**.

There are also further resources available to help pharmacy owners and pharmacists understand what is expected when supplying medicines online, including **this article in Regulate** and examples of notable practice in online/distance selling pharmacies **on our Knowledge Hub**.

Thank you in advance for your assistance in sharing this important message.

Best wishes

**Claire Bryce-Smith**  
**Director of Insight, Intelligence and Inspection**