



**Royal
Pharmaceutical
Society**
of Great Britain

A local lobbying toolkit for pharmacists

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1. What is the toolkit?

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain represents the views of members to Government on all issues related to pharmacy: via consultation documents; formal committees and groups; in private meetings with ministers, politicians and civil servants.

In some situations where actions by the Government impact upon pharmacy, a united response from our members at a local level would prove invaluable to the Society and highly persuasive to the Government. In these instances, the most powerful campaigning tool available to the members of the RPSGB is the members themselves.

This toolkit, produced by the RPSGB, is a resource to assist those campaigning at a local level, in constituencies. It will help to promote and support lobbying activity by local pharmacists and individual local Branches. Through local lobbying, pharmacists can highlight and raise awareness of key issues, such as the development of advanced services, and seek to influence decision-makers and opinion formers in their own constituencies. Local lobbying activity can help you to build relationships and influence with your local MP, and spur them into action on behalf of pharmacy.

This generic toolkit provides the necessary material and practical guidance required to enable you to embark upon local lobbying activity.

In this toolkit you will find:

- a four-step guide to lobbying;
- information on using the local media;
- a sample letter to your MP;
- a checklist of activity to undertake.

The RPSGB is undertaking a nationally co-ordinated campaign, raising awareness of what pharmacy can provide to patients – such as a range of additional services - utilising the strength of its members, to highlight the benefit that pharmacy can deliver to the public.

Pharmacists working in secondary care or in primary care organisations will be more limited in how they are able to lobby on a particular issue. They will be constrained by their terms of employment and activities such as visits to workplaces would need to be agreed by their employing organisation. These members will be more limited in the methods of lobbying they can undertake. They would also have to make clear that any activity they undertake is in their personal capacity and not fall foul of their terms of employment.

However, they could make representation to their AM, MSP or MP in their personal capacity in their own time.

The Public Affairs Team at the Society will provide briefings on any centrally organised campaigns with advice and support available via the telephone number given at the end of this section.

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society invites all its members to participate in the campaign to demonstrate to Members of parliament exactly what pharmacy can deliver for patients and how it is the most untapped resource in primary healthcare. Continuing guidance and support will be given from the RPSGB Public Affairs and Communications team once you have

embarked upon a campaign so please join in and help make a real difference to pharmacy and for pharmacists.

For further information and advice, please contact:

Charles Willis,
Head of Public Affairs,
Public Affairs & Communications Directorate
Tel: 020 7572 2670
e-mail: charles.willis@rpsgb.org

2. At-a-glance guide

- **Decide to participate**

In any lobbying campaign there is strength in numbers. The effectiveness of such a campaign depends upon the maximum number of colleagues and supporters participating. For individuals participating in such a campaign, it is important to have as much information to hand as possible before commencing.

The RPSGB will provide suitable background briefing in addition to offering practical guidance throughout the process, to ensure that every participant's lobbying is as successful as possible. The success of every pharmacist at a local level becomes a part of the greater success of the profession.

- **Start the process**

The toolkit contains templates that can be utilised to create an effective campaign letter, to be sent to your Member of Parliament. It also explains the process, in order to create the best possible outcome.

- **Plan for the event**

There are instances when a visit by a local MP will create valuable results for a campaign. Such visits are very cost effective and generate local media coverage, in addition to building a relationship with a politician that can be utilised in subsequent campaigns.

- **Use the local media**

The local press and radio may be interested in your lobbying activity, particularly if you are organising a pharmacy visit. The toolkit provides you with a sample press release to help you get your story into the media.

- **Where can I get advice?**

The RPSGB will provide you with comprehensive support and advice at every stage of the process. Please contact Charles Willis, Head of Public Affairs: tel: 0207 572 2670.

3. The four steps to influence

Step 1: The issue

Some pharmacists have already met their MP, either professionally or at a social event. The difference between having spoken socially to your MP and lobbying is that lobbying is a targeted and planned activity, with the aim of raising a particular issue and bringing influence to bear on the way that it is viewed and, ultimately, the way that it is resolved. Individual meetings at a constituency level are often part of a much larger, co-ordinated approach that combines several methods of engagement at specific points in a national campaign.

Meetings with MPs will be more business-like and they will expect a case to be put to them, outlining the issue, the effect it will have upon pharmacy and the public and why they should become involved. This information will be made available by the Public Affairs Team within RPSGB.

Step 2: Who to contact?

Contacting your MP

MPs represent an average of 60,000 people and receive hundreds of letters, telephone calls, e-mails and invitations every week. Most MPs have offices both in their constituency and in Westminster. They are usually required to be in Parliament from Monday to Thursday each week, throughout the year whilst Parliament is in session (which roughly coincides with school terms). Friday is spent in the constituency, giving MPs a chance to have meetings with their staff, attend local events and hold surgeries for constituents. Many MPs also make themselves available over the weekend for similar activity.

Many pharmacists will know their local MP and some will have made contact previously. If you do not know who your local MP is, the easiest way to find out is to use the MP "locata" service on the Parliament web-site at: <http://findyourmp.parliament.uk/commons/l/>. This service also links to contact details and biographical information about MPs. Contact with your MP can be through correspondence or in person. Correspondence is the best method of contact if you wish to maintain a process that can be traced and kept current during holidays etc. when an MP's office may be closed.

Making contact with the MP in person is an effective way of building a good relationship and encouraging them to take up the issues you want to raise. However, it is important to make contact in a way that is timely and organised. Obviously, if a parliamentarian calls into a pharmacy to pick up a prescription, or if you bump into him/her at a local event, it may not be the best time to lobby them!

The sample letter (See section 4)XXXX provides you with a template with which to write to your MP and request that he/she visit the pharmacy to gain an understanding of the advanced services on offer. Alternatively, a short meeting, or surgery appointment could be organised by telephoning the MP's constituency office, or Westminster office via the House of Commons switchboard on 020 7219 3000. The constituency offices for a number of MPs can be found by calling the (above) Westminster number and asking for the constituency address. If the operator does not have this number, the MP's Westminster office will be able to assist.

It is important to seek a date and time when the MP is available for the visit or meeting, before you make arrangements with other potential participants.

The local media

The local media can be a key part of your local lobbying activity. For example, if you are meeting with your local MP, you may want to invite local press to send journalists and photographers. This has the benefit of being an added incentive for people to participate in the event, and giving local publicity to our profession. You should also make your own arrangements for a photograph, such as by taking your own digital camera. These pictures can then be emailed to local media, the pharmacy sector media, such as the PJ or C&D, and used in your own materials, such as on your website.

A media dimension to the event can also be a helpful way of shaping the ongoing activity and encourage the MP to engage in the issues. If, for example, the MP is participating in a media interview, he/she will want to sound knowledgeable and interested in the issues relating to pharmacy and will need to say how he/she intends to take up the issues.

In planning media contact, you need to identify all possible outlets for your story from mainstream local papers to the trade and free press, and radio and TV stations. Remember, no outlet is too small: often the free newspapers circulated in residential areas are more widely read than national dailies.

Do you have any media contacts already? Personal contacts with journalists, whether from previous coverage, family and friends or just a friendly phone call, can be the quickest way to a story. If not, identify the contact name of the right person for your type of story. This is not difficult: just looking through your local paper you will see the “by-line” of journalists next to the stories they write, and this should help you to identify who is writing on similar themes to yours.

If you are “cold-calling” a newspaper, or local radio, just ask for the name of the most relevant person to your story – such as the news editor/desk for tomorrow’s or future news stories; the features editor for longer, more discursive articles, or the picture editor for photocalls. Larger regional newspapers may have a health editor, or other specialist correspondents.

It is important to involve, and where appropriate, give prior notice to people you are involving in media activity. For example, your MP may be able to supply contact information for the local media outlets, or will be prepared to issue a press release to support your cause. The RPSGB Public Affairs team will help you develop a press release for publication after the event.

Step 3: Set clear objectives

Local lobbying activity is an important opportunity to secure action and continuing support from your MP. You should prepare, in advance, a list of ways in which you want him/her to help you and then try to get their commitment.

Raising an issue with your MP:

When raising issues with your MP, you should aim to win his/her commitment to one or more of the following actions, prioritised according to the type of issue you are raising:

- to write to local decision-makers such as the council or local PCT
- to attend a further meeting, or event, with you
- to write to the Secretary of State for Health to highlight the issues you have raised

- to accompany you on a visit to a local pharmacy to observe a practice development or witness an issue
- to table a Parliamentary Question, either an Oral Parliamentary Question, at health question time, which takes place every four weeks when Parliament is sitting, or a Written Parliamentary Question which can be tabled at any time.
- to join the All-Party Pharmacy Group which is open to all Westminster MPs and Peers.

The Public Affairs team will be able to provide you with additional guidance on these points, as well as a further briefing document outlining the issues that you should look to raise.

If you are involving the media, you should consider what photo opportunities there will be (ie who will be available for photographing where, and what they will be doing) and how this relates to the issues you are raising with the participants. You would need to explain what makes for a good photo opportunity. Photographers will look for an interesting shot that involves the MP participating in an activity – in a consultation room having his/her blood pressure measured etc.

Step 4: Review and develop activity

Once you have embarked upon local lobbying activities, it is important to take stock and review how successful it has been and how you can build on this activity. The contacts you have made can become a long term “network of influence” that you can use to reinforce your current lobby and to use with future issues that you wish to lobby on.

For follow up contact activity to be successful, you should refresh your messages and style. For example, a local MP is likely to be more receptive to your request for a meeting if you suggest that you are keen to update him/her, and to thank them for their efforts. However, if it appears that there has been little progress and that the meeting will only serve to repeat your previous communications, the MP is unlikely to wish to meet you again at this point.

The Public Affairs Team would be pleased to offer support on how to develop local campaign activity that can be utilised as part of a national campaign.

It is obviously very important to thank people for their time in corresponding and meeting with you and to recognise their efforts made on your behalf.

4a. Sample MP letter

[Name of your MP]
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

[Date]

[Salutation should be handwritten]

Advanced services in pharmacy

As a constituent of yours, I am writing to highlight the work currently being carried out at *[name]* pharmacy in *[location]* and to invite you to visit us.

As you will be aware, the pharmacy profession has seen great change over the last few years. Pharmacists have been given increasing responsibility in the provision of front-line primary health care. As a result of the new contractual obligations, we are now offering a range of public health focused services designed to provide the public with the facilities to monitor their own wellbeing and support for the management of long-term conditions outside hospital. We are working hard to deliver these services and are in turn build vital capacity into the NHS at the front line.

[Add more information about advanced services here]

I would like to invite you to visit the *[name]* pharmacy, so that that you can experience first-hand how the pharmacy profession has adapted and innovated in order to meet the needs of your constituents. Your support would obviously be invaluable in promoting new developments in delivering front-line healthcare to a local audience.

I will also be taking the opportunity to invite members of the local and industry press to the event, which I hope will provide a useful opportunity for a photocall for you in the local community.

I look forward to welcoming you to *[name]* pharmacy.

Yours sincerely

[Name]
MRPharmS

4b. Sample Press Release

Local MP, **NAME**, had **his/her blood pressure taken** today during a visit to **NAME** pharmacy, **ADDRESS**.

MPs NAME visited the pharmacy and met pharmacist, **YOUR NAME**, to discuss the growing number of services available from pharmacies, previously only available from a GP's surgery. These services are expected to include: smoking cessation, obesity management, prescribing repeat prescriptions and managing long-term conditions such as diabetes.

MP's NAME commented: "I'm pleased I popped in to my local pharmacy and received the all-clear on my **BLOOD PRESSURE TEST**. I'm impressed that these services are now available within the community at a time convenient to patients. I'm also pleased this initiative will free doctors up to deal with those cases that deserve more of their time. All round this is a huge step forward in the standard of care available to the public."

The new service is available from **NAME** pharmacy after **NAME** Primary Care Trust ...

For further information, please contact **NAME**

5. Checklist of activity

Before the MP visit

Use sample letter to write to your local MP.

Follow-up the letter with a phone call to MP's office, after 2 weeks, to arrange appropriate time/ date for visit.

Contact Charles Willis at the RPSGB for advice and help in progressing the event (020 7572 2670).

Identify the appropriate local media and inform them of intended visit.

Work out the key points and actions that you would like the MP to take away from the event.

After the MP visit

Agree a press release with XXXX for issuing to the local media.

Write to the MP to thank him for the meeting, setting out the key messages and actions discussed.