



PGEU ANNUAL REPORT 2020

**THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS
IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19**



About the PGEU

The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union (PGEU) is the organisation representing Europe's community pharmacists. PGEU members are the national associations and professional bodies of community pharmacists in 32 European countries, including EU Member States, EU candidate countries and EFTA members.

PGEU's vision is to see community pharmacists recognised as key health professionals delivering a dynamic, sustainable and evolving contribution to the health of individual communities while strengthening Europe's health systems. Europe's community pharmacists work at the heart of communities, providing high-quality and professional advice on the safe, effective and rational use of medicines. Often, community pharmacists are the first and the last point of contact between the patients and the health system; as such, they make an invaluable contribution to the health of over 500 million people throughout Europe.

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Foreword by Duarte Santos

PGEU President 2020

2020 has been by far the most challenging year for PGEU since the organization has been established in 1959. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, community pharmacists across Europe have been the frontline in the fight against the virus and they have doing everything in their power to guarantee patients continued access to treatments. They have been accessible 24/7, also during lockdowns, and have arranged home delivery services for the most vulnerable people to ensure continued access to treatments. They have also been the first line of advice, treatment, and referral for many European citizens on common ailments, successfully preventing unnecessary visits to emergency rooms. Therefore, all PGEU efforts this year were focused on providing members all the possible support and tools to respond to the crisis and help pharmacy teams on the ground.

To help our members we have provided them with regular updates, information on the measures put in place in the different countries and guidelines to protect patients and pharmacy teams from the infection. We have also created a COVID-19 information hub collecting insights on the daily fight of community pharmacists against COVID-19 and providing an overview of useful international and national resources for community pharmacists.

The pandemic changed not only PGEU priorities but also the way PGEU works. We were unfortunately prevented from organizing face to face meetings and the PGEU annual symposium, but we learned to find other ways to remain connected, exchange ideas and best practices. We also organised two successful public events, one on shortages¹ and one

on pharmacy services². COVID-19 has also pushed us to join forces and work even more closely with the other health care professional organizations and with the other stakeholders of the pharmaceutical supply chain.

COVID-19 has obviously required most of our resources, but we have not neglected any of the other PGEU priorities, from cancer³ to antimicrobial resistance⁴, from the affordability of medicines⁵ to the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe⁶. Our attention remained high also on medicines shortages and the results of our annual survey show the continued high incidence of medicine shortages in Europe and their daily and burdensome impact on patients and pharmacists. In addition, I decided to commission a study to gather evidence on the added value of pharmacy services for health care systems. The study portrays numerous and diverse pharmacy services provided in Europe including a wide array of pharmacy interventions on COVID-19. It also acknowledges the roles of pharmacies in health promotion, screening, disease, as well as in case management.

It has been an honour to serve as PGEU President during this difficult year. My thanks go to all PGEU members and to PGEU Secretariat for their continuous support throughout my presidency and to all pharmacists who, since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, have been working with tireless commitment and determination to support their communities.



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2020 at a glance

Pharmaceuticals in the environment

On 22 January, PGEU spoke at a lunch debate at the European Parliament on "Pharmaceuticals in the environment" hosted by MEP Jan Huitema (Netherlands, Renew Europe). The debate was also addressed by the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency and the pharmaceutical industry. PGEU highlighted the importance of achieving the right balance between impactful measures to prevent the potential negative effects pharmaceuticals can cause to the environment on the one hand, and access to safe and effective medicines with demonstrated benefits on public health on the other. PGEU also provided community pharmacists' best practices on medicine waste disposal.

A European answer to medicines shortages

On the 23rd of January, PGEU addressed the breakfast debate "A European answer to medicines shortages" organised by the German Medical Association BAE and KBV. The debate was attended by the European Commission, MEP Peter Liese (EPP, Germany) and other European stakeholders. PGEU addressed the audience by sharing the concern for the high inconvenience and distress which shortages have on pharmacy practice and for their potential negative impact on patient health, while supporting the call for coordinated actions across EU member states and collaboration at European level to find solutions and advising to improve communication across the supply chain and use pharmacy professionals' expertise to deal with medicine shortages when they occur.

PGEU Medicine Shortages Survey 2019 Results¹

On the 28th of January, PGEU published the results of the 2019 PGEU Medicine Shortages Survey.⁷

February

Europe's Beating Cancer Plan Conference

On the 4th of February, PGEU attended the Europe's Beating Cancer Plan Conference, organised by the European Commission in the hemicycle of the European Parliament. Speakers included the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and the European Commissioner for Health and Food Safety Stella Kyriakides. The conference marked the launch of a Public consultation on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and Consultation on the Roadmap for Europe's Beating Cancer Plan.

NPA 'hub and spoke' pharmacy dispensing models roundtable

On the 25th February, PGEU attended a roundtable organised by the United Kingdom National Association of Pharmacies (NPA) in London to discuss the challenges and opportunities brought by the hub and spoke pharmacy dispensing models. The event gathered NPA and RPS representatives as well as speakers from NHS England and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

March

Community pharmacists in the frontline in the fight against the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19)

On the 12th of March, PGEU highlighted the situation of community pharmacists working on the frontline against the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and called on governments to maximise the use of community pharmacy practice to meet patients' needs and maintain the continuity of services.⁸

March

PGEU's letter to Commissioner Kyriakides

On the 26th of March, PGEU addressed a letter to Commissioner Kyriakides to highlight the vital role of community pharmacists in supporting patients and European healthcare systems, in which PGEU stressed the negative impact of the COVID-19 on medicines shortages on the whole economy, including the community pharmacy sector. PGEU suggested to seize the opportunity to contribute to the ongoing exchanges between the European Commission, the European Medicines Agency and the supply chain stakeholders. PGEU also highlighted that community pharmacists deserve greater support and more recognition for the work they are doing every day at the service of communities.

April

Meeting with MEP Colin-Oesterlé on medicine shortages

On the 16th of April, PGEU met with the rapporteur of the European Parliament's own-initiative report on medicines availability, MEP Colin-Oesterlé (EPP) to discuss PGEU position on medicine shortages.

May

Community pharmacists supporting patients and healthcare systems during COVID-19

On the 15th of May, PGEU highlighted the vital contribution community pharmacists are making to support patients and healthcare systems during COVID-19 and called on health authorities to make use of the accessible network of pharmacies across Europe to helping to conduct reliable point-of-care tests for COVID-19 when they became available and to use the skills of community pharmacists to assist in effective and efficient immunisation strategies.⁹

June

EU4Health Stakeholder Seminar

On the 11th of June, PGEU participated in the EU4Health Stakeholder Seminar organised by MEP Cristian Buşoi (EPP, Romania). PGEU expressed support during the meeting on a new EU Health stand-alone programme in particular regarding the proposed actions to address the problem of medicines shortages and to improve health system resilience and performance.

PGEU General Assembly

On the 17th of June, PGEU held its first online General Assembly during the Portuguese presidency. PGEU took this as an opportunity to share its video to thank community pharmacies for the tremendous work they have achieved during the pandemic.

PACT Webinar

On the 25th of June, PGEU attended a Webinar organised by the Patient Access Partnership (PACT) on the relaunch of the MEP Interest Group on Equitable Access to Healthcare. The webinar included discussions on the latest health-related recommendations in the framework of the European Semester and on the impact of COVID-19 on the role of the EU in European health policy.

July

European Parliament conference on medicine shortages in the EU

On the 2nd of July, PGEU attended a webinar hosted by MEP Dr Peter Liese and MEP Nathalie Colin-Oesterlé on 'How to address the problem of medicines shortages in the EU'. The representatives of the three European Institutions, including Andrzej Rys (European Commission, DG SANTE) and Thomas Steffen (German Presidency of the Council), together with industry, patients and doctors' representatives addressed the problem of medicine shortages, referring to the European Commission pharmaceutical strategy and suggesting solutions.

PGEU Meeting with EU Health Commissioner

On the 2nd of July, PGEU met with the EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides to discuss the upcoming EU Pharmaceutical Strategy.

PGEU response to the Roadmap on the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe

On 7th of July, PGEU published its response to the European Commission's Roadmap on the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe.¹⁰

PGEU response to stakeholder survey on use of health data under GDPR

On the 9th July, PGEU submitted its response to the European Commission stakeholder survey on the primary and secondary use of health data in light of GDPR which sought stakeholders' opinion about potential EU level action in order to govern the processing of health data across the EU.

Workshop on the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe

On the 14th and 15th of July, PGEU participated in the stakeholder workshops organised by the European Commission (DG SANTE) on the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe. There were four workshops organised which aimed to discuss the Pharmaceutical Strategy Roadmap, access and incentives for patient centred innovation and unmet needs, availability and affordability of medicines for patients and health system sustainability.

PGEU Statement on the Potential use of the data contained in the EMVS to monitor shortages

On the 29th of July, PGEU published a Statement on the Potential use of the data contained in the EMVS¹¹ to monitor shortages. In this statement, PGEU outlined why the EMVS is not an appropriate and effective tool to monitor shortages in the pharmaceutical supply chain, in light of the legal and technical limitations of the system.

September

Flu vaccination 2020-2021: community pharmacists call to action

On the 1st of September, with the approaching seasonal influenza and with the resurgence of COVID-19 cases across Europe, PGEU called on health authorities to make use of the widely accessible network of pharmacies to assist in effective immunisation strategies and integrate community pharmacists into national vaccination strategies.¹²

PGEU Response to the European Commission's Roadmap on AI and ethical and legal requirements

On the 10th of September, PGEU provided its Response¹³ to the European Commission's Roadmap on Artificial Intelligence ethical and legal requirements, supporting the Commission's general objective to ensure the development and uptake of lawful and trustworthy AI across the Single Market through the creation of an ecosystem of trust.

September

Townhall meeting: Europe's Beating Cancer Plan

On the 10th of September, PGEU participated in the Townhall meeting organised by the European Commission (DG SANTE) on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan. The conference presented the progress on Europe's Beating Cancer Plan and some main findings from the EU Public Consultation which had been launched in the second quarter of 2020.

PGEU Position paper and letter to Commissioner Breton on the Digital Services Act

On the 8th of September, PGEU published a position paper¹⁴ raising community pharmacists' concerns on the impact of the DSA package on the online provision of medicines, particularly in a cross-border context.

On the 24th of September, PGEU sent a letter to the Internal Market Commissioner, Thierry Breton, to share the above mentioned concerns and also stress the vulnerability of consumers vis-à-vis the illegal provision of medicines by certain online service providers and platforms.

On the 30th of September, PGEU met with MEP Agius Saliba to discuss the IMCO report proposing recommendations to the European Commission on the Digital Services Act.

Meeting with Commissioners Kyriakides and Breton on COVID-19 preparedness

On the 30th of September, PGEU was invited by the EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides and the EU Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton to discuss the EU preparedness for the resurgence of COVID-19 cases. Directors of the European Medicines Agency, the European Center for Disease Prevention and Control, pharmaceutical and medical devices industry also participated in the meeting. We discussed about possible medicines shortages (including flu vaccines and ICU medicines) and potential problems with the supply of protective equipment. PGEU explained the vital role community pharmacists have been and are still playing in the front line against COVID-19 and the need for more support from the EU and the Member States.

October

Digital Services Act

On the 21st of October, PGEU met with Ricardo Castanheira, digital affairs attaché at the Portuguese Permanent Representation to the EU, to discuss the impact of the Digital Services Act package on the online supply of medicines.

On the 28th October, PGEU met with the European Commission (DG CONNECT) officials to discuss the impact of the Digital Services Act package on the online supply of medicines.

EU Health Summit

On the 26th of October, PGEU attended the EU Health Summit organised by the EU Health Coalition with the participation of Commissioner Stella Kyriakides and German Health Minister Jens Spahn. The event focused on the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic and included workshops on healthcare systems, health policies and digital health and health data.

HTA Network Meeting

On the 27th of October, PGEU participated in the 10th Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Network Meeting organised by the European Commission, in the capacity of a member of the HTA Network Stakeholder Pool. The meeting served to update HTA Network members and stakeholders on its main initiatives and on the ongoing legislative process of the Proposal for an EU Regulation on HTA.

November

Meeting with EU health Commissioner Kyriakides on COVID-19

On the 6th of November, PGEU was invited by the EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides to discuss the EU's preparedness to deal with the resurgence of COVID-19 cases across Europe. ECDC presented the worrying epidemiological situation in all EU Member States. The European Medicines Agency and the pharmaceutical industry reported that at that moment, there are no supply problems for medicines including medicines used in intensive care units. No export restrictions were reported. PGEU stressed the difficult situation regarding shortages of flu vaccines that community pharmacists are facing in many countries, based on the input received from members.

Digital Services Act

On the 6th of November, PGEU met with the European Commission (DG SANTE) officials dealing with Digital Health to discuss the upcoming adoption of a EC proposal on a Digital Services Act and its impact on the online supply of medicines.

PGEU Webinar on Medicines Shortages

On the 10th of November, PGEU hosted the webinar on "Zooming in on managing shortages at community pharmacies" as part of a series of webinars on medicine shortages organised by Affordable Medicines Europe, EAHP, EPHA, GIRP and PGEU. The speakers discussed barriers that must be removed to further support community pharmacists in dealing with medicine shortages and possible ways of improvement.

PGEU November GA

On the 19th of November, PGEU held its second online GA with a welcome message from Commissioner Kyriakides.

At this meeting, PGEU members elected Mr. Alain Delgutte, member of the National Council of the French Chamber of Pharmacists, as PGEU President for 2021 and Mr. Mathias Arnold, Member of Federal Union of German Pharmacists Associations (ABDA) as PGEU Vice-President for 2021.¹⁵

PGEU Best Practice Paper on AMR⁴

On the 20th of November, PGEU released a new Best Practice Paper on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR).

PGEU Position Paper on Affordability of Medicines and Health Systems Sustainability⁵

On the 23rd of November, PGEU published its Position Paper on Affordability of Medicines and Health Systems Sustainability.

PGEU Statement on the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe⁶

On the 25th of November, PGEU published a Statement on the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe welcoming the ambitions set forward in the Pharmaceutical Strategy for Europe adopted by the European Commission. We believe the proposed measures will help ensure patients' access to safe and affordable medicines and the financial sustainability of health systems.

December

The Community Pharmacy Contribution to Europe's Beating Cancer Plan ³

On the 1st of December, PGEU published a Position Paper on Cancer.

High-level conference on the future of medicines

On the 1st of December, PGEU spoke at the High-level Conference on the Future of medicines organised by BAH, the German Association of the self-medication industries. PGEU contributed to the session on switching prescription medicines to over-the-counter medicines and highlighted the key role of community pharmacies in self-care.

ABDA Conference: Medicines Shortages: Giving up? Finding solutions

On the 1st of December, PGEU attended the online Conference: "Medicine shortages: Giving up? Finding solutions!" which was organised by ABDA, the Federal Union of German Associations of Pharmacists, as an event part of the associated programme of the Federal Ministry of Health under the German EU Council Presidency 2020. During the conference, panel discussions focused on the impact of the problem on community pharmacy practice and on patients and public health.

Pharmacy services in Europe: a call to action

On the 14th of December, PGEU organised a roundtable to present the numerous and diverse pharmacy services provided in Europe including a wide array of pharmacy interventions on COVID-19. The event brought together Members of the European Parliament, senior officials from the European Commission, representatives of patients and other health care professional organisations, the OECD, national health authorities and PGEU members to discuss the role of community pharmacists in health promotion and prevention and their contribution to the health of people and to the resilience and sustainability of healthcare systems.



Dolors Montserrat

MEP

“Community pharmacists have played an indispensable role during the pandemic, ensuring public health and patient safety remain a top priority. They should be integrated more into primary care services to alleviate the pressure on our health systems and provide more effective care to our communities.”

Online event:

Pharmacy services meeting people's needs –
a European perspective

14
DECEMBER

3
PM

2020 at a glance - Highlights



PGEU Medicine Shortages Survey 2019 Results¹

On the 28th of January, PGEU published the results of the 2019 PGEU Medicine Shortages Survey. The results highlight the high incidence, the ongoing rise of the number of medicine shortages in most European countries and their daily and burdensome impact on patients and pharmacy practice across Europe.⁷



PGEU Position Paper Digital Services Act¹⁴

On the 8th of September, PGEU contributed to the EU consultation on the Digital Services Act (DSA) and published a position paper raising community pharmacists' concerns on the impact of the DSA package on the online provision of medicines, particularly in a cross-border



Pharmaceuticals in the environment

On 22 January, PGEU spoke at a lunch debate at the European Parliament on "Pharmaceuticals in the environment" hosted by MEP Jan Huitema (Netherlands, Renew Europe). The debate was also addressed by the European Commission (DG ENVI and DG SANTE), the European Medicines Agency and the pharmaceutical industry.



PGEU Meeting with EU Health Commissioner

On the 2nd of July, PGEU met with the EU Health Commissioner Stella Kyriakides to discuss the upcoming EU Pharmaceutical Strategy. One of the main issues addressed was medicine shortages. The Commissioner also acknowledged the vital role of community pharmacists in ensuring patient safety and promoting public health.



PGEU Best Practice Paper on AMR⁴

On the 20th of November, PGEU released a new Best Practice Paper on Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR). The paper calls upon EU institutions and Member States to maximise the contribution that community pharmacists are making in tackling AMR and encouraging the prudent use of antimicrobials. It also provides an overview of ongoing best practices of community pharmacists across Europe on AMR.



The Community Pharmacy Contribution to Europe's Beating Cancer Plan³

On the 1st of December, PGEU published a Position Paper on Cancer. It highlights the commitment of European community pharmacists to take up an enhanced role in providing quality, convenient and affordable access to professional healthcare services within their domains of expertise related to cancer prevention, early detection, treatment and in improving people's quality of life.



PGEU Position Paper on Affordability of Medicines and Health Systems Sustainability⁵

On the 23rd of November, PGEU published its Position Paper on Affordability of Medicines and Health Systems Sustainability providing community pharmacists considerations on pricing and reimbursement policies in Europe and on other dimensions of affordability and health systems sustainability, focusing specifically on the importance of primary care, prevention and community pharmacy services, to promote health systems resilience.



Community pharmacy as an indispensable element of the COVID-19 response

Since the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, community pharmacies have been playing a vital role in supporting local communities. With their professionalism, expertise and commitment, community pharmacists have managed to guarantee patients access to the treatments they need and to maintain continuity of primary healthcare services in these challenging times. Across all EU Member States, and even more in the areas where the COVID-19 outbreak hit the local communities more severely, community pharmacies have served their patients with great generosity remaining the key and first point of contact between the patients and healthcare systems. Furthermore, community pharmacists have played a vital role in the identification and management of potential cases of COVID-19.

However, similar to other sectors, community pharmacy has also been faced with significant challenges to overcome. Over the last months, many European community pharmacists have experienced the hardest times in their

pharmacy. Community pharmacies have experienced a notable increase in the number of requests and phone calls from patients, numerous enquiries for delivery services and increasing levels of staff sickness. This type of increasing demand for professional advice has resulted in additional costs for pharmacists to maintain the highest level of services. Furthermore, community pharmacists undertook modifications of their premises and their daily routines to implement containment and safety measures as recommended by health authorities. Consequently, many independent community pharmacies across EU countries have been dealing with existing cash flow and financial viability problems.

Especially during the first couple of weeks of the panic, the workload for pharmacists increased dramatically. Many countries saw citizens rushing to purchase over the counter medicines such as paracetamol, as well as items like personal protective equipment (PPE) and hydroalcoholic

hand gel, which pharmacists began to compound in several countries because supplies had run out so quickly.

Alongside this, lockdown measures were implemented relatively quickly in a number of countries; and pharmacies were one of the only public healthcare services to remain freely open to the public. This presented additional challenges – a shortage of PPE meant that pharmacy staff (and customers) were not as well protected as they could or should have been in the first weeks of the pandemic.

Throughout the crisis, pharmacies across Europe have continued assisting the health authorities and have

expanded their contribution to support their local communities. The PGEU COVID-19 Information Hub¹⁶ provides further insights in the roles and commitments of community pharmacists in the fight against COVID-19 by highlighting several stories from community pharmacists in the frontline across Europe.

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Community pharmacy services related to COVID-19

As recommended by the OECD^{17 18} and WHO Europe¹⁹, many European countries have introduced changes in legislation to expand the role of pharmacists and relieve pressure on the rest of the healthcare system. Some countries have also secured additional funds to empower pharmacists in their vital work on the frontline against COVID-19.



OECD: Crisis situations like the coronavirus epidemic can provide opportunities to change the traditional roles of different health care providers and expand the roles of some providers like nurses and pharmacists, so that they can take on some of the tasks from doctors and thereby allow them to spend their time more effectively on the most complex cases.”

A study conducted by the Institute for Evidence-Based Health (ISBE)²⁰ of the University of Lisbon has mapped 30 pharmacy interventions on COVID-19 provided throughout Europe. Among the most frequent immediate actions in response to pandemic are symptom-based referral pathways for suspected cases, increased demand to home delivery of medicines, pharmacy telephone support to vulnerable patients during isolation and dealing with the new vulnerable patients. These are all important patient care interventions in screening, access, and vulnerable patient support and exceed far beyond pharmacist's traditional dispensing role.

Even more interesting are expanded powers granted to pharmacies and legislation passed in view of COVID-19. In total, 17 interventions had expanded powers granted to pharmacists in 16 countries.

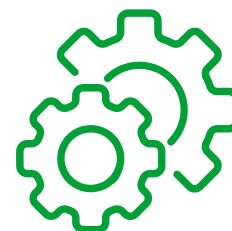


30

pharmacy interventions on COVID-19 provided throughout Europe



17



interventions had expanded powers granted to pharmacists in 16 countries.

Guaranteeing continued access to care and treatments

At the onset of the crisis, several countries implemented measures to guarantee the continuity of treatment for patients with chronic conditions and reduce the number of non-essential visits to primary care surgeries or hospitals. This was done by giving pharmacists the opportunity to renew repeat prescriptions for chronic medications in 5 European countries and enabling the electronic transfer of prescriptions to pharmacies where this had not been

implemented yet. In 6 countries, this also included the extension of the pharmacist's scope to provide alternative solutions for occurring medicine shortages.

In 4 countries, community pharmacies have also been granted extended powers to dispense certain medicines which before were only accessible via hospitals.



In 5 countries

community pharmacists have been provided with the opportunity to renew repeat prescriptions for chronic medications



In 6 countries

community pharmacists have been provided with the opportunity to provide alternative solutions for occurring medicine shortages

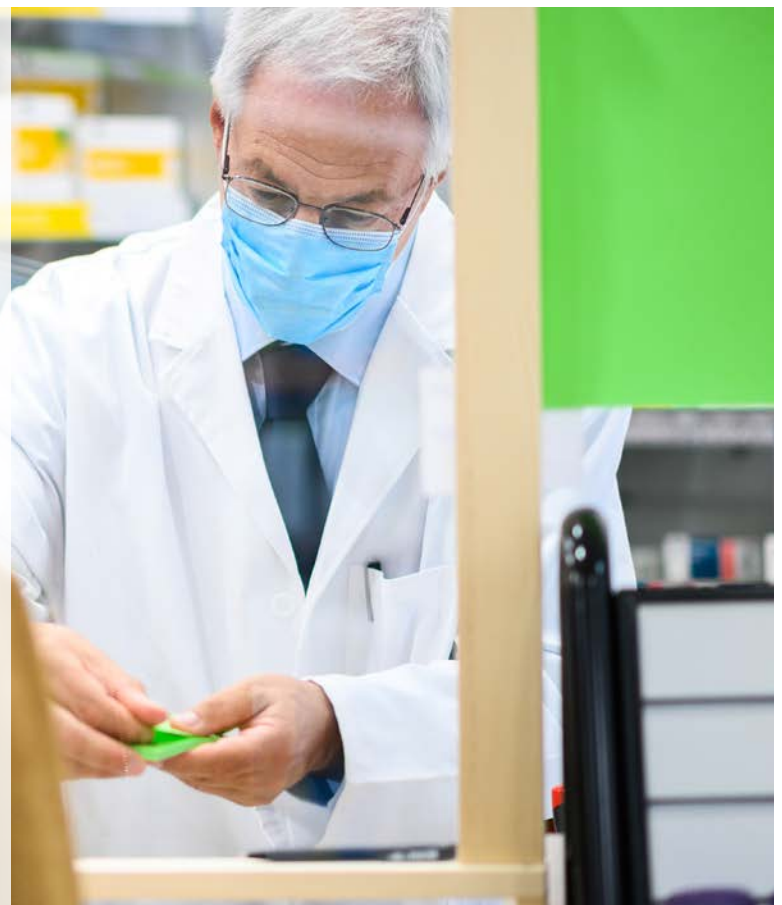


In 4 countries

community pharmacies have been granted extended powers to dispense certain medicines which before were only accessible via hospitals



OECD: The need to maximise the efficiency of available resources also led to several innovations in the roles and responsibilities of different health professionals. The role of community pharmacists, for instance, was broadened in many countries at least temporarily to address urgent needs and reduce the need for doctor consultations for non-COVID19 patients. In France, Ireland and Portugal, community pharmacists were allowed to renew and dispense the prescription for patients with certain chronic conditions.”





In 5 European countries

authorities have also installed new remuneration provisions for home delivery services of community pharmacies.

In 8 European countries

community pharmacists have activated protocols to help victims of domestic violence observed during lockdowns.

In 7 European countries

healthcare systems have granted expanded powers to community pharmacists in relation to dispensing and administering flu vaccinations.

First line of advice, treatment and referral

Throughout the crisis, community pharmacists have been the first line of advice, treatment and referral for many European citizens on common ailments, successfully preventing unnecessary visits to emergency rooms.

Pharmacists know their patients and their families very well across generations and understand their social context and needs. They can combine technical knowledge with the “human touch”, to provide personalised healthcare. This makes their role in providing accessible patient-centred care within their communities more critical than ever, especially for the vulnerable groups in society. Pharmacies have extended delivery services of medicines from pharmacies to vulnerable patients’ homes and in 5 European countries, authorities have also installed new remuneration provisions for home delivery services of community pharmacies.

In 8 European countries, community pharmacists have activated protocols to help victims of domestic violence observed during lockdowns. This measure enables women who are in a situation of risk or danger to their physical, psychological and / or sexual integrity, to approach their trusted pharmacy either via a helpline or by requesting a "Mask 19" in the pharmacy. This code will then trigger the needed care protocol for these victims.

Increasing vaccination coverage

Another challenge the healthcare system has been faced with is the risk of a possible ‘twindemic’ of both the seasonal flu and COVID-19. In order to achieve a high uptake of the flu vaccination while ensuring that immunisation services can continue to be delivered safely and accessibly in the middle of a pandemic, in 7 European countries, healthcare systems have also granted expanded powers to community pharmacists in relation to dispensing and administering flu vaccinations. These include the supply of flu vaccines to at risk groups without the prior need for a prescription such as in Belgium and Norway and the launch of expanded pharmacist-delivered flu vaccination programmes and pilots in Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy and Portugal. Also, for the roll-out of mass vaccination campaigns for COVID-19, countries such as Ireland, Greece and the United Kingdom announced to make use of the accessible network of pharmacies to assist in the administration of vaccines in the community.

Amid these challenges it is vital to maximise the use of community pharmacy practice to meet patients’ needs and maintain continuity of services. Community pharmacy has demonstrated its value for patients and healthcare systems during this crisis and is ready to further expand this contribution as part of sustainable collaboration models with other healthcare professions in the community.



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Amid these challenges it is vital to maximise the use of community pharmacy practice to meet patients' needs and maintain continuity of services. Community pharmacy has demonstrated its value for patients and healthcare systems during this crisis and is ready to further expand this contribution as part of sustainable collaboration models with other healthcare professions in the community.”

PGEU Member Best Practices



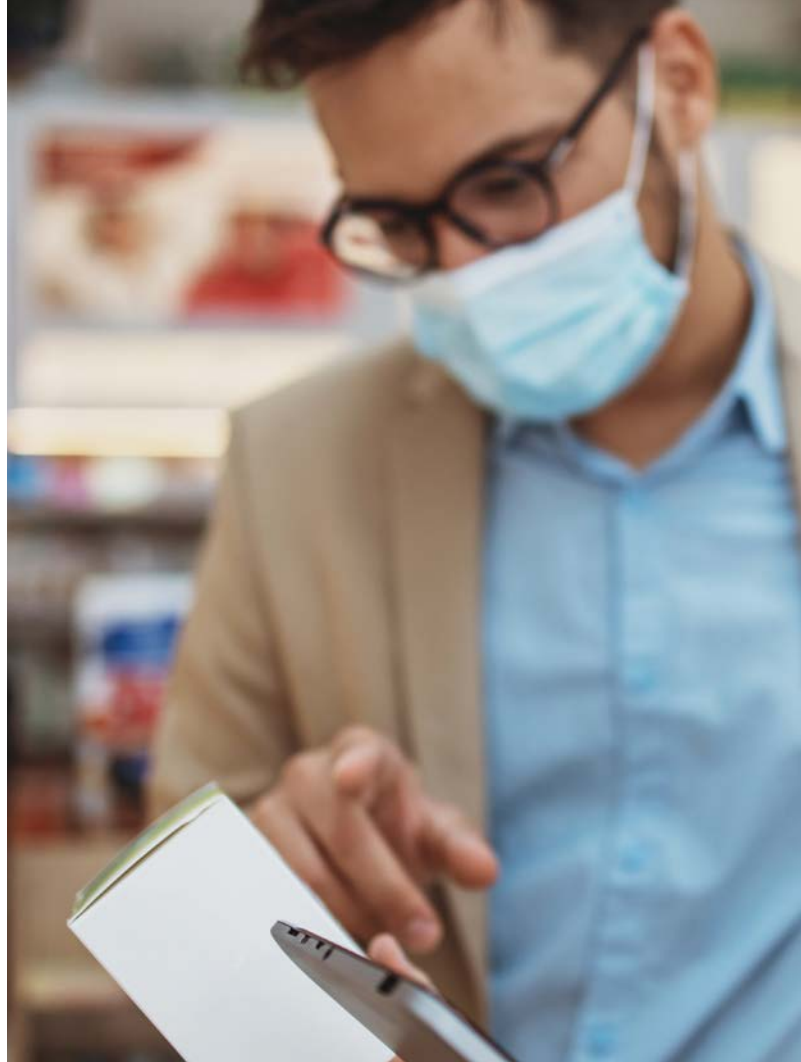
Portugal: Increasing access to hospital-only medicines via community pharmacies

The dispensing of hospital only medicines in the community setting (at the community pharmacy or home delivery) was implemented in Portugal to promote better access and safety to the patient. According to a study²¹ conducted by the Centre for Health Evaluation & Research (CEFAR) to measure the value generated by this intervention, the survey respondents revealed an increased satisfaction level with the service provided by community pharmacies, compared to hospital pharmacies in every evaluated category: opening hours, waiting time, privacy, availability of the pharmacist and overall experience of the service. The study also shows that, in a post-pandemic scenario, 91% would choose to keep this service provided by the community pharmacy.



Germany: Extended rights to resolve medicine shortages

In order to resolve the supply bottlenecks more effectively and preventing patients from having to return to the pharmacy, pharmacists in Germany have been allowed to deviate from the pack size or strength of a drug or, after consulting with the doctor, substitute it for a similar medicine. Pharmacists are now also remunerated for their home delivery services during the pandemic.²²



Scotland: Empowering community pharmacy as a first port of call for common ailments

In Scotland, pharmacists have been empowered in this role during the COVID-19 pandemic through the extension of the Minor Ailment Service and increased access to Emergency Care Summary Data.²³ The NHS Pharmacy First Service allows community pharmacies to give people expert help for treating conditions such as sore throats, earache, and cold sores, along with common clinical conditions such as Urinary Tract Infections. Pharmacy teams will offer advice, treatment, or referral to other healthcare teams if required. In order to help pharmacies cope with increased pressures from the coronavirus, community pharmacies were also provided with additional funding.²⁴



Greece: Pharmacy contribution to the national vaccination plan against COVID-19

In recent years Greek community pharmacists have been empowered in their role to increasing vaccination coverage. Since 2019, Greek community pharmacists have been enabled to administer flu vaccinations in pharmacies as a complement to existing vaccination services, which have demonstrated very positive results already.

In advance of the launch of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign the Panhellenic Pharmaceutical Association (PFS) has organised a comprehensive training program for pharmacists to support them in their critical role to promote vaccination to the general public through the provision of valid and reliable information. Over 8000 pharmacists²⁷ have updated their knowledge of COVID-19 vaccine developments through the Institute for Lifelong Learning and Professional Development of Pharmacists (IDEEAF)²⁸, where the in-depth training program is launched, and will function as information/counselling centres for citizens on COVID-19 vaccination. In addition, an awareness and information campaign is launched in Greek pharmacies for the general public on COVID-19 vaccination.

Furthermore, Greek community pharmacists will function as booking centres for citizens to schedule their COVID-19 vaccination appointment. This service aims at supporting people who have limited digital skills and are not able themselves to book their appointment via the Greek's government online appointment system. Greek pharmacists will also be remunerated for providing this service.



Ireland: Extended pharmacist-delivered flu vaccination programme

Since 2011, community pharmacists can administer the flu vaccine. In October 2020, new legislation has been passed allowing pharmacists to provide a flu vaccination service also outside of the pharmacy premises e.g. the patient's home, their car, a drive through service, nursing home, workplace or business premises, community/church hall, sports centre, school/creche etc.²⁵

As a result of the expansion of the flu vaccination programme in September 2020, Irish pharmacists can supply a free flu vaccine and will be paid by the health service to administer the flu vaccine to all citizens over 65 years, those aged 6-23 months and 13-64 years in an at-risk group via a flu vaccine injection and all healthy children aged 2-12 years via a nasal flu vaccine.²⁶

A look forward

COVID-19 has been devastating for public health. The virus killed many people and health care systems in Europe and around the world have been struggling to assist both COVID-19 patients and patients with other health conditions. Many countries had to make the necessary decision of canceling non-essential care to free up personnel and resources to cope with COVID-19 setting back hard-won progress for example in the fight against non-communicable diseases.

But nothing worse than the pandemic would be not to learn from it and not to use it as opportunity to improve. The main lesson learned for the health care sector is that we must change the way health care is provided and move from a hospital centered care to a patient centered care, treating patients as close to their home as possible. This means investing more in primary care. Academics, policy makers and international institutions such as OECD²⁹ have repeatedly stressed that investing in primary care pays off: a large body of evidence clearly indicates that it reduces hospitalization rates and prevents unnecessary visits to emergency rooms, it saves lives and money.

new responsibilities through advanced pharmaceutical services that have proven to improve people quality of life and health systems' sustainability.

We should use this opportunity to make health systems stronger, more resilient, and more responsive to patients' needs. We should define new models of care delivery which involve multi-professionals' teams working seamlessly - with the support of integrated digital technology - to ensure continuity of care especially for patients with chronic conditions.

If not now, when...

In 2021 PGEU efforts will be dedicated to make sure that the lessons we have learned since the beginning of the outbreak and the available scientific evidence of the added value of community pharmacists for the health care system are translated into concrete policy actions and that the potential of community pharmacists is fully exploited to better serve patients and to get better prepared for future public health threats.



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Now the time has come. With all countries around the world still battling COVID-19, we cannot afford to continue putting on hold health prevention and health promotion. European community pharmacists are there to take up the challenge. They remain in the front-line against COVID-19 providing their communities with timely access to treatments, information and in some countries also rapid COVID-19 tests and vaccines, but they are also ready to use their knowledge and expertise to provide more efficient and more effective care to patients. The 400.000 community pharmacists across Europe, through the network of 160,000 community pharmacies, are eager to reinforce the delivery of core pharmacy services and to go even further, assuming

We will also work closely with the EU institutions on the Pharmaceutical strategy for Europe adopted by the European Commission in November 2020 to find meaningful solutions to the problem of medicines shortages, to enhance the role of community pharmacists in fighting antimicrobial resistance and to help reducing the impact of medicines on the environment. We will also contribute to the Europe's Beating Cancer plan which will be published in February 2021 and to the European Health Data Space initiative to promote interoperability of information systems and foster the exchange of data between community pharmacists and other health professionals.



“

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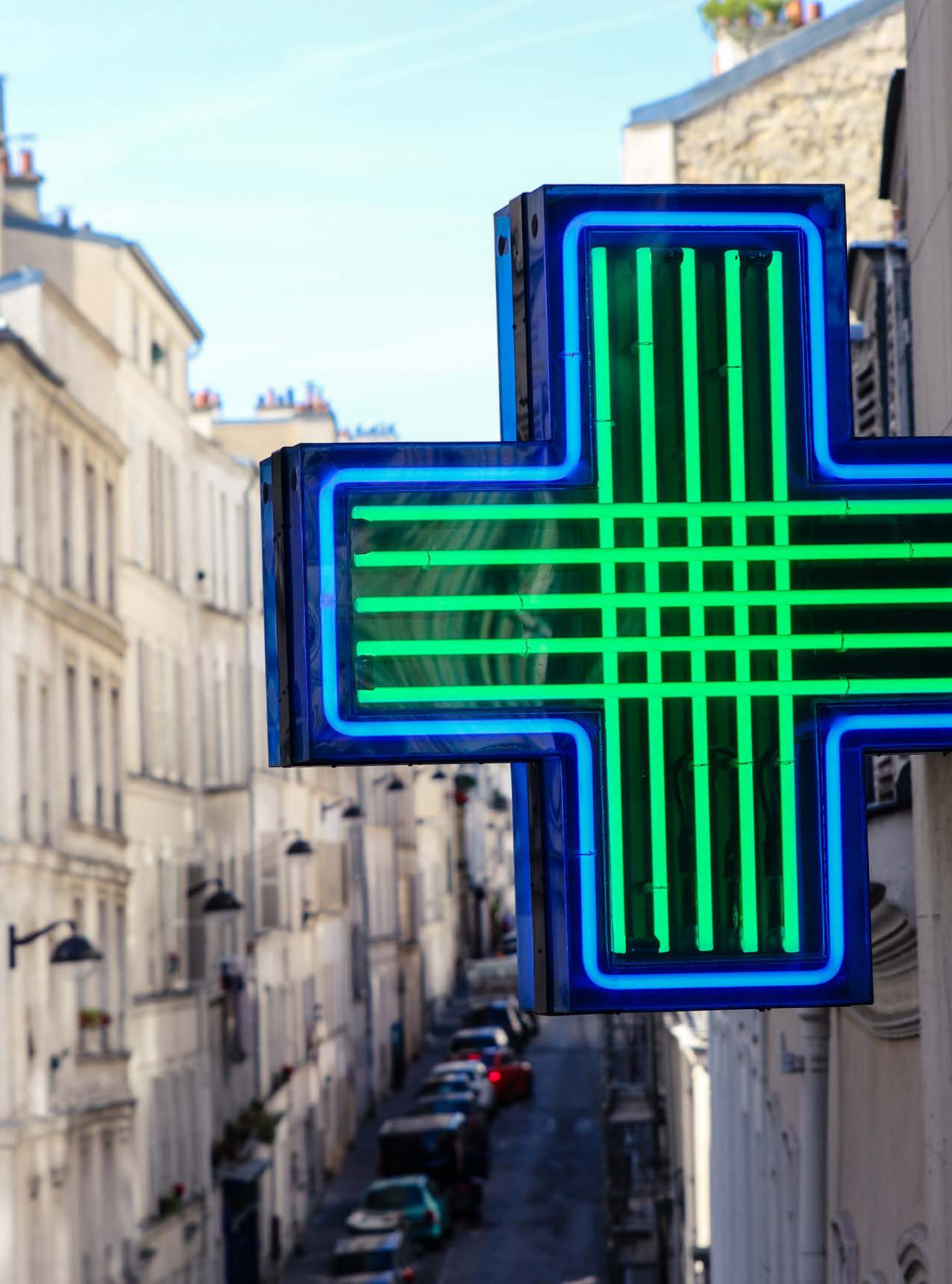
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Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland

Royal Pharmaceutical Society

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