

Recognising an era: A Tribute to Community Pharmacy North of Tyne

Community Pharmacy North of Tyne (CPNOT) is coming to an end. As the committee prepares to join forces with Community Pharmacy North Cumbria, I will take a moment to reflect on its legacy. One marked by innovation, resilience and unwavering commitment to contractors and the communities we serve.

Before I do, I want to formally acknowledge the incredibly challenging financial situation the sector is currently facing as a result of the well-documented government underfunding of community pharmacy. This, along with the challenging medicines supply market, makes running a viable community pharmacy extremely difficult. I thank all our contractors for the amazing efforts you and your teams make every day to deliver the patient care and outcomes we are known for in such challenging times. Your LPC has been ensuring that CPE is aware of your challenges, and we now await the outcome of the current national contract negotiations.

Leading local negotiations and representation CPNOT, formerly and legally recognised as North of Tyne Local Pharmaceutical Committee, has long been a forward-thinking committee, quick to adapt to the complex and shifting political landscape of the NHS. Always responsive to the evolution of the Integrated Care Board (ICB) as it transforms once again following the abolition of NHS England, we have chosen to take a bold, future-focused step: to join forces with Community Pharmacy North Cumbria. This move, aligned with the recommendations of the Wright Review, ensures continued high-quality and best-value representation for all contractors across the region.

Before we look ahead, it's only right that we pause to celebrate what has been achieved together.

PSNE: A Vision Realised

One of our most significant accomplishments has been the creation and success of Pharmacy Services North East (PSNE) a provider company created in collaboration with neighbouring LPCs, that quickly became nationally recognised.

PSNE has consistently added value for contractors, enabling smoother and prompt payments for commissioned services and supporting the LPC to freeze the levy for several years a testament to its sound operation and impact.

Pioneering Patient Care Ahead of National Policy

Long before the arrival of the national Pharmacy First service, contractors in our area were already leading the way with innovative locally commissioned services.

- **Bye Bye UTI** gave women rapid access to treatment for urinary tract infections at a time when such an approach was unheard of.
- Our **walk-in emergency supply service** offered timely support without unnecessary delays.
- **Think Pharmacy First**, enabled minor ailments to be treated without a GP appointment—reducing pressure on GP practices and improving access for patients.

Together, these services didn't just support our population they helped build the evidence base that shaped and influenced the national Pharmacy First rollout.

To support this transition, we ensured every contractor received an otoscope and we delivered a comprehensive programme of high-quality training sessions covering dermatology, depression, blood pressure management, consultation skills and more. These sessions continue to be well received and valued by contractors. In conjunction with Tees' LPC we supplied all North of Tyne contractors with a laminated tool as a handy consultation prompt for the 7 clinical conditions PGDs.

Leadership During Exceptional Times

During the pandemic, CPNOT negotiated protected local service income for contractors and was among the fastest LPCs in the country to coordinate large-scale delivery of the COVID-19 vaccination service—moving at pace and demonstrating leadership when it mattered most.

The pandemic forced health systems to do things differently and presented pharmacy with a number of local funding opportunities. Our team helped shape the ICBs vision around what could be possible and the consistency and scale of delivery gave the commissioner confidence to move from short term funding models to locked in recurrent contracts.

Championing pharmacy first and how the service could help improve patient access to their GP enabled the team to secure ICB funding for backfill for our PCN leads and also funding for local coaches to work with surgeries and their pharmacies to unlock these benefits.

Strengthening Local Partnerships

Under the dedicated efforts of Carolyn and Dee, we achieved and maintained a full cohort of PCN Leads throughout my tenure as Chair. Their work has fostered meaningful relationships with local stakeholders and the much-loved Pizza Evenings became a cornerstone of local engagement always well attended, always highly valued.

We have also ensured new contractors felt welcomed and supported through our evening training sessions, some linked to the AGM, helping to build confidence and connection from day one.

Championing Pharmacy First and Local Engagement

Dee's leadership on Pharmacy First also deserves recognition. Her work:

- Supported GP surgeries with training and engagement, despite persistent IT system barriers.
- Built relationships with local universities to embed awareness of Pharmacy First from the ground up.
- Led to the creation of an award-winning advertising campaign in the school magazine *Let's Go*—an idea that started here and was quickly adopted nationally.

This energy and advocacy has been instrumental in driving referrals and strengthening cross-sector understanding.

Supporting Contractors Through a Challenging Funding Landscape

Recognising the ongoing pressures on community pharmacy finances, we organised an event in collaboration with the NHSBSA and NPA to help contractors navigate current funding streams more effectively. Feedback was exceptional including one contractor's comment that it was the **"best LPC event they'd ever attended."**

More recently, we delivered Papyrus suicide-prevention training, further contributing to the wellbeing and safeguarding capacity within our local pharmacy teams.

National Influence and Recognition

Our longstanding relationship with Community Pharmacy England (CPE) continues to be strong. In recognition of our positive and collaborative approach, CPNOT became one of the first LPCs invited to observe CPE at work reflecting the respect built over many years. CPE has gone on to invite regular LPC member attendance at their meetings from each region on a rota basis.

We've also welcomed and facilitated numerous MP visits, strengthening political understanding and support for the vital role pharmacy plays. Officers and chairs have attended various parliamentary events to support CPE colleagues and messages.

Looking Ahead with Confidence

As healthcare delivery evolves toward integrated neighbourhood models, we are proud that our area benefits from representation at every one of the Health and Wellbeing Boards in our geography ensuring the voice of community pharmacy remains influential and respected.

Community Pharmacies' recent track record of delivering a range of health outcomes at scale, such as covid vaccinations and pharmacy first, gives us a strong foundation on which we can build and to explore future novel solutions that can deliver new funding streams for our contractors whilst achieving the health outcomes so needed by our patients and the wider health system.

Closing One Chapter, Beginning Another

CPNOT has been built on passion, dedication and the belief that community pharmacy should be championed at every level. The achievements we celebrate today reflect the hard work of committee members, officers, contractors and partners, past and present.

On behalf of committee and contractors I would especially like to thank Ann Gunning and Geraint Morris for their passion, dedication and continued unwavering support for community pharmacy.

As we join with Community Pharmacy North Cumbria and move into the next era of representation, we do so with pride in what we have accomplished locally and with excitement for what may lie ahead. We acknowledge that the current national funding is not sustainable, and we look to CPE and our government to provide the national contract and funding that will allow community pharmacies to thrive.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of this remarkable journey.

Kim Whitehouse