

Alliance Healthcare Opens Access to Cancer Symptom Referral Scheme to UK Pharmacies Following Successful Launch Across Alphega Pharmacy Network

The 'Not Normal for You?' (NNFY) scheme, which enables pharmacists to refer patients showing potential cancer symptoms to their GPs, will be available to pharmacies across the UK following Alliance Healthcare's decision to expand the scheme to all pharmacies.

As part of the rollout, Alliance Healthcare will provide pharmacies with marketing materials - including leaflets and referral cards, free-of-charge, as part of their standard delivery.

The scheme, pioneered by Alphega Pharmacy member - Jackie Lewis, owner of Lewis Pharmacy in Exmouth, was rolled out across the Alphega Pharmacy network of more than 1,000 pharmacies in the UK in October 2023.

Through the scheme, pharmacy teams are trained to spot potential early symptoms of cancers and other illnesses. All pharmacy staff, from counter assistants to pharmacists, will be trained to look for 'red flag' symptoms and behaviour, which may be indicative of certain cancers.

Following the identification of symptoms, a pharmacist can discuss the issue with the individual and encourage them to visit their GP if appropriate. Symptoms are written on the back of an eye-catching 'Not Normal for You?' orange referral card which can be presented to a GP in order to confirm symptoms. Although the NNFY card does not enable a faster GP visit, it acts as a mode of validation of symptoms which makes it quicker for a GP to give a referral.

The brightly coloured referral card often acts as a prompt for patients to book an appointment with their GP, further increasing the likelihood of diagnosis after potential symptoms have been identified by pharmacy staff.

The initial rollout of the scheme across Alphega pharmacies showed that NNFY was extremely effective in enabling pharmacists to refer patients to their GPs, which was largely due to the existing relationship between pharmacy staff and their patients.

Jackie Lewis first rolled out the scheme to 10 pharmacies across East Devon after she was awarded £10,000 in funding from the National Pharmacy Association's (NPA's) Health Education Forum. Jackie is also extremely grateful to Bristol Myers Squibb for their grant which enabled material development, upscale and roll out of the project. The pilot of the scheme was a success and led to its rollout across Alphega pharmacies.

Jackie has also developed a free online training programme called: 'Let's communicate cancer' which aims to teach pharmacy teams about cancer symptoms using videos and quizzes. The resource is hosted on the British Oncology Pharmacy Association website and the NPA's websites.

During the pilot a patient in one pharmacy was encouraged to visit his GP following a repeat request for purchase of cough medicine. The pharmacist concerned attended a practice meeting and was informed that this particular patient had been diagnosed with lung cancer as a result of her referral, six months later his wife came into the pharmacy and thanked the pharmacist as her husband was now in remission.

This case study is in Module 1 of Let's Communicate Cancer.

The pilot also revealed several cases of skin cancer.

Participation in the scheme will be open to pharmacies across the UK. More information about the scheme and how to participate can be found at: Bopa.org.uk/cancerhub

Jackie Lewis said: “The ‘Not Normal for You?’ scheme offers pharmacists and their staff resources and training for the early identification of cancer in patients visiting their pharmacy. The timely detection of cancer is incredibly important and I would encourage pharmacies across the UK to participate in the scheme. By equipping frontline healthcare providers with the tools to recognise potential symptoms, lives can be saved through early treatment.”

Dr Mandeep Mudhar, Head of Alphega Pharmacy UK, adds: “The ‘Not Normal for You?’ scheme has been positively received by Alphega Pharmacy members and engagement continues to increase. With 1.6 million people visiting their community pharmacy each day in England, pharmacists are well-placed to support, and Jackie has worked tirelessly to increase awareness and empower pharmacists to have more agency when supporting their patients. We will continue to encourage our members and pharmacies to offer this service to their patients as part of our ambition to create healthier futures for all.”

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Notes for editors:



Image:

1. Lewis Pharmacy, Exmouth, Devon – owned by Alphega Pharmacy member - Jackie Lewis
2. Not Normal For You? Card

About Alliance Healthcare:

Alliance Healthcare is one of the largest pharmaceutical wholesalers in Europe, supplying a comprehensive range of pharmaceutical, medical and healthcare products. It provides a personalised approach to services and solutions for pharmacist customers and manufacturer partners.

For more information, visit: www.alliance-healthcare.co.uk

About Alphega Pharmacy

Alphega Pharmacy is a leading European network of independent pharmacists, whose aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of communities by delivering a future vision for independent community pharmacy.

For more information on Alphega Pharmacy UK, visit: www.alphega-pharmacy.co.uk