

Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

November 2024

Dear Secretary of State,

While national systems have historically mitigated shortages effectively, we are concerned about the growing impact of medicines shortages on patient care and the NHS.

This is the subject of a new report from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS), *Medicines Shortages: Solutions for Empty Shelves*, developed in collaboration with patient groups and stakeholders, which examines the causes of medicine shortages and what more can be done to mitigate and manage their impact.

The report explores recent high-profile examples of supply issues, including for ADHD, diabetes, epilepsy, and Parkinson's, as well as Hormone Replacement Therapy and Pancreatic Enzyme Replacement Therapy. We have heard reports of some patients travelling for miles to find a dispensing practice or pharmacy that has their medicine in stock, which is particularly challenging in rural areas and is exacerbating health inequalities.

When a patient is unable to access their medicine, this can have a devastating impact on their lives – and the lives of the families who care for them – leading to deteriorating health, mental distress, and potentially dropping out of work or education, having a significant impact on the national ambition to grow the economy. There is a further knock-on effect on NHS services and potentially avoidable hospital admissions.

Medicines supply issues also have a hidden cost within the wider health service. Prescribers have to spend time re-writing a prescription when the original medicine is out of stock. Pharmacy teams across primary and secondary care are spending more time sourcing alternative medicines supplies. Time that could otherwise be supporting wider NHS services.

This RPS report calls for a cohesive cross-government and NHS strategy across the UK to improve medicines access, which is supported by the undersigned. This should consider actions to build supply chain resilience, support UK manufacturing, improve data connectivity, protect access to life-critical medicines, and reduce duplication across the NHS.

As the Government looks to develop a 10-Year NHS Plan, this must help ensure that patients can continue to access vital medicines, which are an investment in their health. This will require work across Government, the NHS and the whole of the medicines supply chain, engaging with manufacturers, suppliers, health professions and patients.

There is a growing recognition that greater collaboration is needed to help drive change to limit the impact of medicines shortages on patients and healthcare teams. It will now require leadership from those who have the power to make change happen. Empowering pharmacists to be able to make appropriate substitutions to help manage shortages, as recommended by the Health and Social Care Select Committee, could be a positive signal of that leadership.

We would welcome the opportunity to work closely with you and the Department to bring about the recommendations of this report and support the changes required to help patients and the healthcare system.

Yours sincerely,

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Chief Executive, British Generic Manufacturers Association

Dr Julius Parker  
Deputy Chair, GP Committee, British Medical Association

Professor Janice Rymer  
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