

Mr David Pfleger
Director of Pharmacy
NHS Grampian Health Board
Dispensing Practice Review Group

Dear Mr Pfleger

In response to the review currently being conducted by NHS Grampian into the dispensing of medicines at our branch surgery in Udney Station, it is the opinion of the Scotstown Medical Group that many of the patients whom we serve from that location would have serious difficulty in getting to a community pharmacy to obtain their medication. Not only that, they may as a result of any change to the nature of the dispensing service we provide find it more difficult to see their doctor, as any reduction in dispensing is likely to jeopardise the viability of the Udney surgery with the likely outcome a reduced service with a high risk of closure. We feel it essential the review committee consider the wider implications of the removal of practice dispensing.

The rural location of Udney Station is not viable for a full community pharmacy, the nearest of these being in villages that are between 6 and 10 miles away such as Tarves and Balmedie, with poor public transport links. Of the almost 2000 patients registered as approved for dispensing, about half live in the AB41 postcode area where Udney Station is located. The elderly and frail are not those who would necessarily have access to private transport or drive themselves, and we believe this would result in some patients delaying having their prescriptions filled until a friend or family member could assist with possible adverse clinical consequences.

Our Udney surgery serves a rural population stretching from the village of Potterton at its southern edge to Udney Green and Newburgh on our northern boundary. Some of the patients in this area live on farms, or isolated homes on narrow country roads. Patients may have to walk a considerable distance to catch a bus to any of the nearest community pharmacies, and the return journey could be a long one. Equally, young mothers with pre-school children would find the challenge of travelling to Tarves or any other pharmacy within ten miles or so a daunting one.

It is easier for patients to travel to Udney Station from Potterton by public transport than to Bridge of Don. Two buses are required for the latter journey with a significant walk to the Bridge of Don surgery and pharmacies. The journey from Udney Station to the Tarves pharmacy by bus offers a three minute window to enact the prescription and missing this then requires a one hour wait for return journey by bus.



**Scotstown
Medical
Group**

CAIRNFOLD ROAD
BRIDGE OF DON
ABERDEEN
AB22 8LD

Appointments Tel 01224 702149
Enquiries Tel 01224 551415

The result of this is, we believe, that many of our Udney-registered patients would find it extremely difficult to obtaining their medication in a timely manner which could lead to poorer clinical outcomes. A round trip of some twelve or fifteen miles, even if not using public transport is ridiculously far to contemplate, especially in winter. It constitutes, in our opinion, the very essence of the serious difficulties enshrined in the legislation.

While it may be argued that those who require regular repeat prescriptions could plan more effectively to ensure continuity of supply, the acute medication prescribed at a consultation with a GP is often needed urgently and the ability to obtain it will be severely curtailed. Furthermore, if the practice was permitted to dispense acute medications only, the fixed costs to the practice in terms of staffing, dispensary costs and increased base contract cost burden with pharmaceutical wholesalers is likely to be prohibitive. The fact that the surgery itself may be forced to restrict its opening hours or even close altogether would be an additional burden on patients in the area, creating even more serious difficulties. We also note that under recent changes to the rules under which pharmacies can apply for permission to open then it is likely that the practice would be deemed vulnerable and the pharmacy application could be refused as a result. While we are not aware of any such application being made, the definition of the vulnerability of the practice remains.

The Udney Station practice is uniquely positioned with a well defined rurality, covering some 30 square miles. The patient population naturally gravitate towards it and threatened closure would then add a further burden to Bridge of Don and Shire practices, blocking progress with planned city realignment of patients to the north cluster practices. We would therefore respectfully suggest that the committee consider our arguments but also be brave and look beyond the narrow perspective of poorly drafted primary legislation governing this issue and maintain Udney Station dispensing in its present form.

Our patients do not deserve a poorer quality service, there is little financial saving to NHSG and the Scotstown Medical Group Partnership is strongly united with our patient population in its desire to continue to serve this rural community who so value their primary care service.

Yours sincerely
On Behalf of Scotstown Medical Group

Dr RB Lamberton

Dr AA Forbes

Dr R Gupta