

# Guidance on the provision of pharmacy services affected by religious and moral beliefs

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The General Pharmaceutical Council is the regulator for pharmacists, pharmacy technicians and registered pharmacy premises in England, Scotland and Wales. As part of our role, we set the standards which govern the practice of pharmacists and pharmacy technicians.

## **About this guidance**

This document provides guidance on standard 3.4 of the **standards of conduct, ethics and performance** which states

**You must make sure that if your religious or moral beliefs prevent you from providing a service, you tell the relevant people or authorities and refer patients and the public to other providers.**

## **Status of this guidance**

This document gives guidance to pharmacy professionals on what they need to do if their religious or moral beliefs affect the provision of pharmacy services to patients and the public. Pharmacy professionals may also need to consider their contractual obligations, such as the NHS Terms of Service, if they are unable to provide a service.

This document also provides guidance to employers on what they need to do if they employ a pharmacy professional whose religious or moral beliefs may affect a service they provide.

N.B. The GPhC Council has agreed that this provision will be reviewed during the first 12 months of operation.

## Guidance for pharmacy professionals

Failure to provide specific pharmacy services will affect patients and the public, colleagues, employers and service commissioners. It is essential that relevant persons are informed and that patients and the public are directed to other service providers.

If your beliefs prevent you from providing a pharmacy service you should

### **Before accepting employment**

- 1.1 Think about where you are going to work and if the services you object to providing will be available and accessible in that vicinity. You need to remember that you must make patients your first concern.
- 1.2 Find out
  - If you will be working on your own or with other pharmacy professionals who will be able to provide the service
  - Where you would direct patients requesting the service
  - Whether the service you intend to direct patients to will be accessible and readily available to them at the time you will be on duty
- 1.3 Tell employers, relevant authorities and the colleagues you will be working with about your beliefs. The persons or authorities who need to be informed may include
  - the superintendent pharmacist, pharmacy owner, pharmacist manager or other person responsible for employing pharmacists
  - locum agencies from whom you are seeking employment
  - the Primary Care Organisation or other body with whom you or the owner has a contract for services.

### **Responding to requests for a service**

- 1.4 You are responsible for ensuring that the patient is properly informed about why the service they are requesting is not available. Be open and honest about your reasons for not providing a service as this will help patients understand and maintain trust and confidence in the profession.
- 1.5 Handle the situation sensitively. In some cases the initial request for a service will be made to another member of the pharmacy team so make sure that all staff are aware of your views and are trained to deal with the initial requests for services affected by your beliefs.

- 1.6 Respect the patient's right to confidentiality and take all reasonable steps to ensure appropriate levels of privacy for patient consultations even when you are unable to provide a service.
- 1.7 Patients should not be discouraged from seeking further information or advice.

**Remember**

- If you do not supply Emergency Hormonal Contraception (EHC), (either over the counter or against a prescription) women should be referred to an alternative appropriate source of supply available within the time limits for EHC to be effective.
- If you do not supply Routine Hormonal Contraception, women should be referred to an alternative appropriate source of supply available within the time period which will not compromise the woman's contraceptive cover.
- If you refer a patient to a doctor's surgery or hospital you should think about whether the patient will be seen by a doctor or other appropriate practitioner within the timeframe required for treatment to be effective (i.e. consider factors such as the practice's opening hours and whether the patient will be able to get there).
- If you refer a patient to another pharmacy, check that there will be a pharmacist available there who can provide the service and that they have the relevant stock.

## Guidance for employers

Before you employ a pharmacy professional check whether they have any beliefs that prevent them from providing a particular pharmacy service. You must consider whether patients could be directed to alternative providers of the affected service in the vicinity.

When you employ pharmacy professionals whose beliefs prevent them from providing a pharmacy service, you should

- 2.1 Be satisfied that enough information has been given to the pharmacy professional about the services provided in the pharmacy they are going to work in.
- 2.2 Have policies and procedures to guide staff in managing requests for services affected by moral and religious beliefs so that requests are handled appropriately and patients are able to access the services they require. Clear information on alternative services must be provided.
- 2.3 Ensure staff members are appropriately trained and provide them with the contact details and availability of local providers of the affected services.