



## Pharmacy First in Practice

### Grand Union PCN: Releasing Capacity and Improving Access

#### Background

Pharmacy First was formally launched on 31 January 2024 to support GP practices by enabling the redirection of appropriate cases to community pharmacy. The scheme aims to improve patient access to care while protecting GP capacity for more complex clinical needs. Uptake, both nationally and locally across Northamptonshire, has been variable; however, within Grand Union PCN the programme has been particularly successful.

This document has been developed to share the learning and good practice emerging from their approach.

Grand Union PCN comprises five GP practices serving a diverse patient population. Like many Primary Care Networks, it has experienced sustained demand pressures, particularly relating to minor acute presentations that could be safely and effectively managed in alternative settings.

#### At a Glance

<b>5 practices</b>	<b>10 weeks</b>	<b>£11,000</b>
Participating in the PCN	Clinical time released	Estimated annual saving*

#### What has changed with Pharmacy First

- Integrated referral processes available for SystemOne (via [BaRS](#)) and EMIS practices
- Removal of MFA (multi-factor authentication) barriers within clinical systems
- Clear internal workflow for identifying suitable patients
- Consistent messaging across practices
- Reinforcement of appropriate referral criteria

#### Impact for the PCN

- Reduced avoidable GP appointments for minor illness
- Improved same-day access for appropriate patients
- Released clinical capacity for complex and long-term care
- Strengthened collaboration between general practice and community pharmacy

The estimated annual financial impact equates to over £11,000 in released resource, alongside approximately 10 weeks of GP clinical time.

#### Voices from the PCN

*“Pharmacy First has been a genuinely positive development for our practice. Developing close, trusted relationships with our local community pharmacist has improved how we manage demand and support patients to be seen in the right place first time. As we’ve become more confident about which patients to refer, our escalation rates have dropped significantly, and the scheme has had a clear, measurable impact on improving access to appointments within the surgery. A key factor in making this work has been giving our local Community Pharmacist direct access to the duty doctor*



*(via mobile phone), so they can contact us easily while the patient is still in the consultation room, allowing queries to be resolved quickly.”*

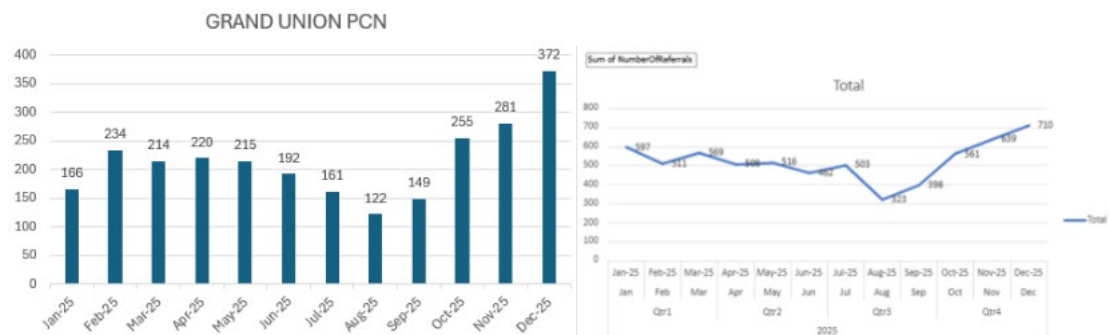
**Dr Massey, GP Partner, Grand Union PCN**

*“We love the pharmacy first service. It was certainly worth the time to embed the referral pathway into our PCN practices; not only have we liberated some of our clinicians’ time to spend on more complex patients, but we have also built stronger working relationships with pharmacies in the area, which results in more joined-up and better care for our patients.”*

**Jo Pennell, PCN Manager, Grand Union**

*“From the community pharmacy perspective, our close working relationship with Grand Union PCN shows what effective integrated primary care can look like in practice. The practice team has been proactive in referring appropriate patients into Pharmacy First and minor illness pathways, and we have a clear route to the duty GP when clinical discussion is needed. This enables rapid clarification and shared decision-making, reduces avoidable delays, and supports patients to receive the right care first time—without unnecessary signposting or repeat contact. Overall, this joined-up approach improves patient experience, strengthens confidence in the pathway, and provides a strong foundation for wider GP–community pharmacy collaboration across Northampton.”*

**Rickey Patel, Superintendent Pharmacist, Sage Pharmacy, Northampton**



Graph showing Grand Union’s GP referrals to Pharmacy First in 2025    Graph showing ICB GP referrals to Pharmacy First in 2025  
Grand Union sent over 50% of the ICB total referrals in the month of December 2025

## Summary

- Improves patient access
- Releases measurable GP capacity
- Delivers operational and financial benefit
- Strengthens system collaboration

For further information, please visit the [Primary Care Portal](#). If your practice or PCN would like additional support with implementing Pharmacy First, please contact [arti.patel24@nhs.net](mailto:arti.patel24@nhs.net) and/or [olivia.fraser3@nhs.net](mailto:olivia.fraser3@nhs.net)

\*Calculation based on healthcare professional rate for a 10 minute appointment