

Boots sore throat service to be 'scaled up', but fees still undecided

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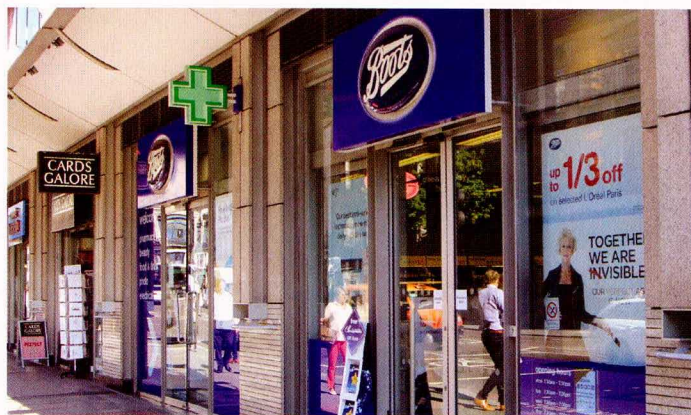
A sore throat 'test and treat' service, piloted by Boots in 2014, has been adopted by NHS England to be "scaled" up.

The scheme, designed to prevent antibiotic resistance and reduce GPs' workload, will see community pharmacists conduct throat swab tests to determine whether patients need antibiotics.

NHS England is backing Boots' scheme through its NHS Innovation Accelerator (NIA) programme, which is designed to fast-track new treatments and technologies into the health service (see box, below).

However, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) stressed that "no central funding is being made available to commission this service" and it will be up to local clinical commissioning groups to decide whether to roll out the scheme in their areas.

A pilot of the scheme ran across 20 Boots stores in London between October 2014 and April



Boots: Scheme is an opportunity for collaborating with other pharmacies

2015, and another 15 branches in Leicestershire between January and April 2015.

A review of the pilot, conducted by University College of London Hospitals and published in the *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy* in July, revealed that two-thirds of participating patients who would have seen their GP for their sore throat did not need to do so.

Boots estimates that an additional 800,000 patients could potentially be seen in community pharmacies rather than general practice if the service is rolled out nationwide, saving the NHS "millions", it said last week.

Under the pilot, patients who tested positive for *streptococcus group A* - the typical bacteria associated with throat infections - were offered antibiotics.

Patients paid £7.50 for the initial swab test and a further £10 if antibiotics were supplied.

In response to C+D's question as to whether the costs would remain the same when the scheme is expanded, Boots said on Tuesday: "The costs used, and outlined in the published findings, were established to cover the expected costs of provision of the pilot.

"Now that it is complete, we will be working with the

NIA, and local and national commissioners, to understand the best model for bringing the innovation to market."

Malcolm Harrison, senior manager for project and contract development at Boots, and now a fellow of the NIA programme, said the scheme could provide "large-scale coverage" and "more opportunity to work collaboratively with industry partners and other pharmacies".

Chair of the Royal

Pharmaceutical Society's

English pharmacy board Sandra Gidley described the news as a "win-win all round".

"New technologies like this have the potential to enable

patients to get quicker, accurate tests whilst still having that all-important conversation with a health professional to give appropriate advice and treatment," she said.

"Ideally we would like to see a national minor ailments service that encompasses this kind of treatment."

Funding questioned

However, both Lloydspharmacy and PSNC have raised concerns around how the roll-out will be funded.

Cormac Tobin (pictured centre), managing director



Your shout

We are already facing a 12% cut, so to use the global sum to fund this service [would] not make sense. Seems like more work and less pay.

Sunil Lakhani, pharmacist

Reducing workload pressures on GPs is all well and good, but what about workload pressures on pharmacists?

Stephen Eggleston, community pharmacist

I'm all for expanding pharmacists' roles, but I [would] not be in favour of [NHS England] claiming that this is a NHS service and then making patients pay for it.

Thomas Bisset, contractor, Ward Green Pharmacy

of Lloydspharmacy's parent company Celesio UK, warned on Monday that the pharmacy budget must not be used to fund the scheme's expansion.

NHS England's decision to back the sore throat service shows "some joined-up thinking", he said. However, there must be "new money for pharmacy" to help fund the project, "not more tinkering with the global sum".

Pharmacists are in an "ideal position" to conduct the service and the benefits are "considerable", Mr Tobin said. "But it will only happen if the government backs up its rhetoric with a proper — and properly funded — plan," he added.

PSNC director of NHS services Alastair Buxton (pictured left) said the announcement "runs contrary to the

funding cut", which will see a 12% drop in the sector's funding in England from December and "will adversely affect the ability of pharmacies to provide patient care".

**NHS
England**

The Innovation Accelerator's work:

- The sore throat service is one of eight schemes selected for this year's NIA programme.
- Announcing the new schemes earlier this month, NHS England said that last year 17 "innovations" were rolled-out across "over" 380 NHS organisations.
- The NIA is led by NHS England and delivered in partnership with 15 academic health science networks, 11 of which provide "financial contributions".

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