

# How do Primary Care Network pharmacists use the SPS Medicines Advice Service?

Authors: Diane Bramley<sup>1</sup>, Haafizah Ahmed<sup>2</sup>, Jen Stevenson<sup>2</sup>

1 Medicines Information, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust; 2 King's College London.

## Introduction / Background

NHS England commissions 4 Medicines Information services at 5 locations, including Guy's and St Thomas' Trust (GSTT) to provide the Specialist Pharmacy Service (SPS) Medicines Advice (MA) service for NHS primary care healthcare professionals. This study aims to understand how Primary Care Network (PCN) pharmacists use the SPS MA service and whether any training needs can be identified to help PCN pharmacists feel confident in addressing their own questions.

## Results for Retrospective Review of Enquiries

- SPS MA received 665 enquiries from PCN pharmacists from 41 out of 42 Integrated Care Board (ICB) areas during the 6-month period.
- Enquiries per ICB ranged from 2 to 41 enquiries per 6-month period and the majority were moderate complexity (level 2). [Fig 1]
- Mean number of enquiries per 100 000 population 1.35 (range 0 – 4.18).
- The majority of enquiries were submitted via phone (55%) but answered via email (81%).
- 93% of enquiries were answered within the SPS MA's 5 day deadline.
- Of enquiries breaching 5 days: 42% were handled over bank holidays; 35% were herbal; for 28% MA asked for extra details from enquirers.
- Greatest proportion of questions were related to administration and dosage (35%). [Fig 2]
- Greatest proportion were answered using a mix of free and subscription resources (47%). [Fig 3 and 4]

Figure 1 Number of enquiries per ICB area and complexity of question (1= simple, 2 = moderate, 3 = complex)

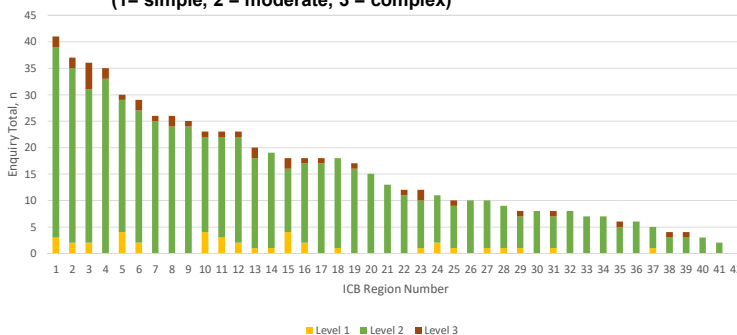
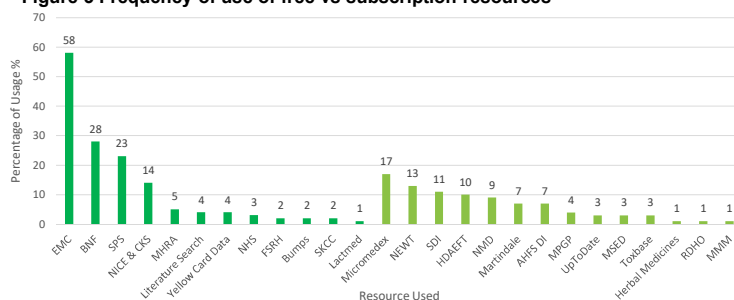


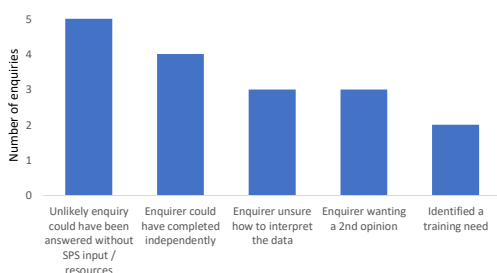
Figure 3 Frequency of use of free vs subscription resources



## Results for Prospective Review of 50 Enquiries

- 36 (72%) enquirers had consulted resources before calling SPS MA.
- For 35 (70%) enquiries, the SPS MA staff requested further details to fully understand the question.
- 20 (40%) enquiries could be answered with free resources only.
- Of these, it was unlikely the enquirer could have answered without SPS input or resources for 5 enquiries (25%). [Fig 5]

Figure 5 Of enquiries answered with free resources - Could enquirers have answered their own question?



## Methods

Enquiries received by GSTT (April to Sept 2023) from PCN pharmacists were retrieved from MiDatabank enquiry-recording database. Data reviewed included: ICB area, type of questions and complexity, resources used by MA staff (free or subscription), method of contact/reply, time taken. The investigator also shadowed SPS MA pharmacists to prospectively collect data on a further 50 enquiries, identifying any barriers to enquirers answering their own questions e.g. difficulty finding and interpreting information, needing second opinion.

Figure 2 Types of questions asked by PCN pharmacists

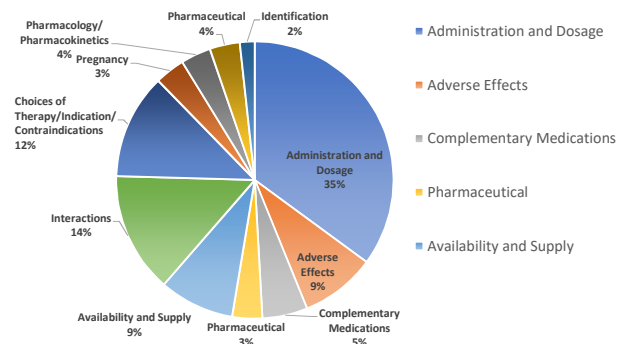
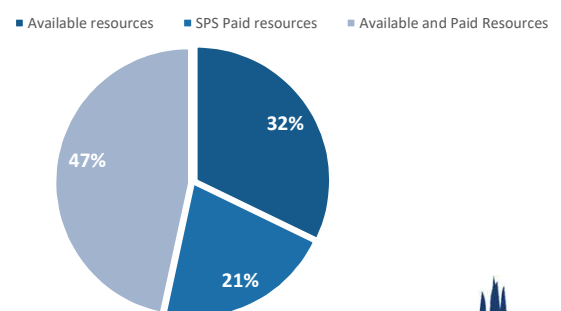


Figure 4 Enquiries answered using free vs subscription resources



## Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations

SPS MA is well-used by PCN pharmacists but engagement varies by ICB region. Improved marketing of SPS MA may be beneficial in some areas. For a third of enquiries, the answer was found in free resources available to PCN pharmacists implying other potential barriers to answering their own questions. This study found a lack of confidence in: using resources; interpreting information and decision-making. Guidance on how to use the most common free resources, such as advanced features of EMC and navigating SPS website may improve PCN pharmacists' confidence and enhance their clinical-decision making skills. This study was restricted to GSTT enquiries which limits its representation of SPS MA. Further study including all 5 locations is recommended.