

# **Enter and View Report: Bell Pharmacy**

**520 Roman Rd, Bow, London E3 5ES**

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Visit Details	
Service Visited:	Bell Pharmacy
Address:	520 Roman Rd, Bow, London E3 5ES
Service Manager:	Emad Sadeghian/Shah
Date & Time of Visit:	18 <sup>th</sup> September 2024, 11am-1pm
Status of Visit:	Announced
Authorised Representatives:	N/A
Lead Authorised Representative:	Shreya Mandal

# 1. Visit Background

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets is your **local, independent health and social care champion**. We help local people to voice their **views and opinions** about the services they use.



We **listen** to people and **collect their feedback** on health and social care services.



We **report on key findings** and **make recommendations** for improvement.



We **present these reports** to those involved in the planning and commissioning of the health and social care services.

## What is Enter and View?

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 allows local Healthwatch Authorised Representatives to observe service delivery. We listen to service users and service providers at premises such as hospitals, care homes, GP practices, and pharmacies. The aim is to get an impartial view of how the service is operated and being experienced.

Enter and View visits can be arranged if people tell us there's a problem with a service, but equally, they can also occur when services have a good reputation – so we can learn about and share examples of what they do well from the perspective of people who experience the service first hand.

Following the visits our official 'Enter and View Report' is shared with the service provider, the local

commissioners and regulators. The report outlines what worked well and gives recommendations for improvement. All reports are available to view on our [website](#).

## Disclaimer

Please note, this report relates to findings observed on the specific date of the visit. Our report is not a representative portrayal of the experiences of all service users and staff, only an account of what was observed and contributed at the time.

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets would like to thank Bell Pharmacy, their service users and staff for their contribution and hospitality in enabling this Enter and View visit to take place.

# 2. About This Visit

## Bell Pharmacy

On 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets visited Bell Pharmacy, located in Bow Road, London E3. The pharmacy provides Contraception services, Healthy Living services, Prescription services, Screening and Test services and Vaccination services among other free/paid services. They are listed on [PatientAccess](#) (online platform where the public can book specific free and paid pharmacy services).

During the visit, the Authorised Observer spoke to 4 patients and 6 staff members – including management. During the visit, interaction with staff was limited due to a recent COVID-19 outbreak but a digital copy of the staff questionnaire was sent to the pharmacy manager, who returned the completed versions shortly after the visit.



## Online Feedback

Feedback available on [Google Reviews](#) showed that Bell Pharmacy had received 58 reviews, averaging at 4.6-stars out of 5, prior to our visit on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024. Most feedback commended the pharmacy staff on their kind and attentive approach to customer service. Notably, residents mentioned that staff members are appropriately able to diagnose health concerns and provide medication accordingly.

There are very few comments with a negative sentiment, referring to staff conduct. Thorough responses from the pharmacy manager were observed, aiming to resolve any concerns raised.

poor conduct of specific staff members and dispensation of prescription being transferred to Bell Pharmacy without patient consent or knowledge. Many negative comments received a thorough response from the pharmacy manager who aimed to resolve any concerns raised.

The positive sentiment was consistent across platforms such as [NHS Reviews](#) and [BestCareCompare](#), long-term customers at the pharmacies sharing that the staff tend to go over and beyond to make sure to support their needs.

## Focus of the visit

On 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024, the government and NHS England launched the [Pharmacy First Scheme](#) to give patients quick and accessible care, and ease pressures on GP services. It allows community pharmacies to independently supply prescription-only medication, including antibiotics and antivirals where clinically appropriate.

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets are conducting a meta-analysis style report to explore how community pharmacies are coping with providing these enhanced services.

Most pharmacies that were contacted by Healthwatch Tower Hamlets were unable to accommodate a visit due to increased workload and current pressures on their services.

Based on online feedback, Bell Pharmacy has an excellent reputation regarding the quality of service provided. The aim of the visit was to observe the service quality at Bell Pharmacy and gather patient feedback, specifically pertaining to the sentiment towards the Pharmacy First Scheme.

## Our pharmacy work is making an impact.

In the Healthwatch England [pharmacy report last year](#), it was recommended that pharmacy teams be given greater flexibility to substitute medicines when it is safe to do so and patients agree. This request was reiterated in a [joint letter](#) with other organisations on medicines shortages in November and have made the case privately.

Last month, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society highlighted a recent DHSC (Department of Health and Social Care) response to a coroner's Prevention Of Future Deaths Report, which notes that the Government intends to proceed to a public consultation on our call to enable pharmacists to make appropriate substitutions when something is out of stock.

# 3. Summary of Findings

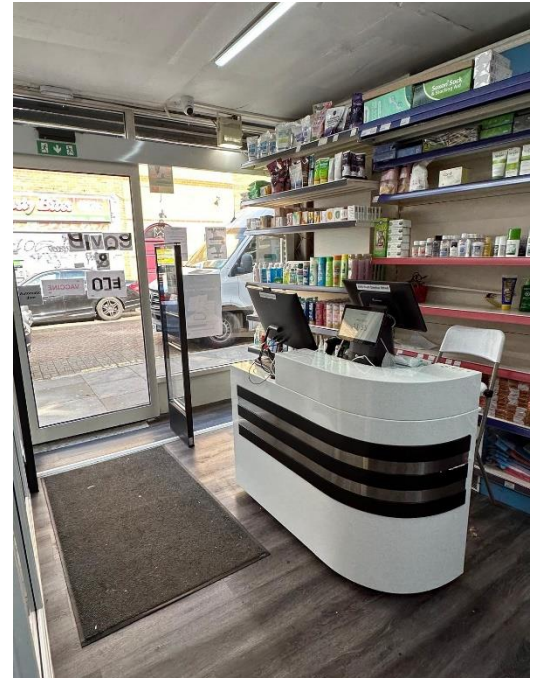
During the visit to Bell Pharmacy, the Authorised Representative was allowed to explore the premises open to the public independently, taking photographs when appropriate.

There are seven categories of observation. These categories include Accessibility, Signage, Environment, Noticeboard, and Other.

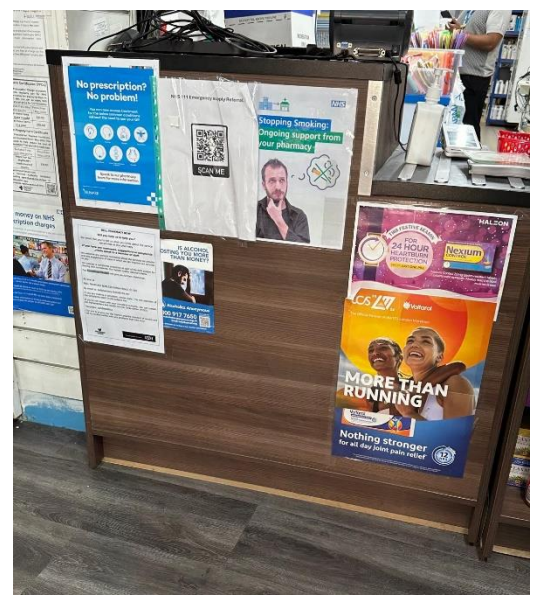
Bell pharmacy is situated in Roman Road Market, located amidst a residential area within Bow, East London. The location can be accessed on foot, tube or bus. The combination of good transport links and high resident traffic at the market means the pharmacy has a constant flow of visitors.

## What worked well?

- **Accessibility:** The pharmacy has an automatic door accompanied by a ramp at the entrance, accommodating those using wheelchairs, push chairs or walking frames (see Figure 1).
- **Environment:** The pharmacy was generally clean and organised. There were 5 chairs available within the pharmacy, 3 for the waiting area and 2 for the consultation area. Staff were friendly and professional.
- **Information displayed:** Posters promoting smoking cessation, NHS 111, the Pharmacy First scheme, Feedback and Complaints procedures were observed. Information regarding the pharmacy credentials were also observed (see Figure 2). Healthwatch Tower Hamlets found the variation of information displayed satisfactory.
- **Other:** A blood pressure machine that could be independently used by patients was observed in the consultation room (Appendix A)



*Figure 1: The pharmacy has an automatic door and a spacious entrance. There was a new counter being installed at the time of the visit.*



*Figure 2: Healthwatch Tower Hamlets found the variation of information displayed satisfactory.*



## What could be improved?

- **Accessibility:** At the time of the visit, the entryway space was narrow due to the installation process of anti-theft measures. The temporary placement of the table may have limited accessibility for those using a wheelchair or walking frames.
- **Signage:** The pharmacy had a banner over the main signboard, which was difficult to read due to the windy weather (see Figure 3). Whilst there was a great variation of posters at the premises, room for display was limited and inappropriate at times. For example, an A4 poster highlighting the 24 Minor Ailments treated at the pharmacy was displayed incredibly low to the ground, making it inaccessible to patients (see Appendix B).
- **Service provision:** During a short interview with the lead pharmacist, it was shared that referrals from GP practices remained low despite attempts to communicate with the practices, leading to the involvement of the LPC (Local Pharmaceutical Committee). Concerns were also raised regarding the Community Pharmacy Selfcare Advice Service and accessibility to eligible residents.



*Figure 3: The entrance of Bell Pharmacy featured a ramp and a temporary banner over the main signboard.*

## Summary of recommendations:

1. Improve the accessibility of the pharmacy entrance and visibility of main signboard.
2. Organise posters based on importance and size to increase visibility.
3. Consider escalating the ongoing concerns with referrals from GP practices and eligible patient access to the Selfcare Advice service to Primary Care Network (PCN) managers.
4. Provide more training opportunities for staff members and implement more robust accessibility accommodation.

# 4. Interviews

During the visit on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024, we had the opportunity to interview a few patients and staff members, along with the pharmacy manager at Bell Pharmacy.

Due a recent outbreak of COVID-19 amongst staff, face-to-face interactions during the visit were limited and questionnaires were independently filled out by staff. We asked a total of 13-15 questions on various topics such as consultations, environment and feedback.

## Staff Experience Report on Expansion of services

### Overview:

Bell Pharmacy expanded its services to include ongoing management of oral contraception, minor ailments referrals from emergency care, blood pressure checks, and smoking cessation support. This report provides insights from staff feedback, highlighting changes in patient referrals, workflow adjustments, training requirements, and patient perceptions.

## Lack of Patient Referrals from GPs

57% of staff agreed that there has been an increase in patients but not necessarily from GP practices – patients were more likely to self-refer themselves.

There were concerns regarding the low number of GP referrals that the pharmacy had been receiving – averaging at 2 referrals per day when 10-15 referrals were expected. Bell Pharmacy has attempted to communicate with the GP practices to address the ongoing issue which has resulted in the involvement of the LPC (Local Pharmaceutical Committee). This had been going on for 6 months at the time of the visit. The pharmacy deals with many GP practices but the most notable ones were St Stephen's Health Centre, Ruston Street Clinic, Tredegar Practice and Grove Road Surgery.

The Community Pharmacy Selfcare Advice Service ([CPSAS](#)) is available for those with low-income within NEL



(North-East London). It allows eligible individuals to access over the counter medication for free-of-charge. In the past pharmacists could approve the eligibility, but now only GP receptionists and other health professionals at GP practices can approve the eligibility. Staff were concerned that this had created a barrier to accessing healthcare for some service users at Bell Pharmacy, with some GP practices refusing to refer patients who are eligible.

## 1. Perception of New Arrangements

All the staff members at Bell Pharmacy agreed that the expansion of services is likely to improve patients' access to health services going forward. One staff member noted that the influx of patients should have been higher but there are still obstacles to overcome to improve accessibility. In the past, the pharmacy has stayed open till 11pm to maximise patient accessibility

The pharmacy manager emphasised the need for raising awareness of the enhanced services provided by pharmacies.

## 2.Changes in Work Practices

It was reported that Bell Pharmacy has been busier due to the increase in patients and some staff had worked overtime to ensure medication was delivered to patients on time. Generally, staff at Bell Pharmacy have not had to make significant changes to their work practices.

## 3.Resources, Training, and Staffing

To handle the increased workload, Bell Pharmacy had employed more trained staff but 57% of staff felt that more training should be provided. As a result of the increased workload, there had been ongoing difficulties in training new staff members in-house. It was noted that the LPC had provided a lot of training for pharmacy staff.

## 4. Patient Perception and Feedback

Patients generally expressed satisfaction with the expanded services, appreciating the ease of accessing healthcare for minor ailments without long waits. The staff at Bell Pharmacy were confident in their service provision, having staff members with more than 10 years of experience in the field. However, a staff member shared that they were unsure whether patients were aware of the new services.

Methods for collecting feedback consisted mostly of verbal exchanges, encouraging patients to leave comments on their website or Google Reviews or send any queries via email. Patients are also offered the option of speaking to the manager directly if requested. A staff member shared that the pharmacy did not have an in-house feedback mechanism.

## 5. Handling Complaints and Referrals

Although the Healthwatch Tower Hamlets team had observed the complaints procedure poster displayed at the pharmacy, 60% of staff were unsure or did not think that it was displayed in a visible location. The poster encouraged patients to share any feedback or complaints by speaking to a member of staff or sending an email to a provided email address.

## 6. Assistance for Diverse Patient Needs

Staff at the pharmacy were fluent in languages such as Bengali, Urdu, Hindi and Arabic and support patients with language barriers, using tools like translators when necessary. Bell Pharmacy also had leaflets in different languages to make health information more accessible.

Accessibility arrangements for those with hearing, visual or learning impairments were unclear and not explicitly shared with Healthwatch Tower Hamlets staff.

## 7. Recurring Themes

There was a recurring call for GP practices to sufficiently inform their patients of the services available at pharmacies, actively referring patients with minor ailments for pharmacy consultations and provide updated information regarding schemes that patients were eligible for.

### Conclusion:

Generally, patients at Bell Pharmacy appeared to have a positive sentiment towards the expansion of the services, finding it much more accessible in comparison to GP practices. The pharmacy has several experienced staff, some exceeding 10 years of experience, allowing them to feel confident in the quality of service they provide.

Concerns were expressed regarding the lack of patient referrals for pharmacy consultations and CPSAS from GP practices. There was an emphasis on the need of increasing patient awareness and confidence in the pharmacy's ability to provide expanded services.

## Selected Patient Feedback



*I visit the pharmacy for help with my health and they do their best to assist. They often refer me to the GP due to the complexity of my condition. It's still very difficult to see [the GP].*



## Selected Patient Feedback



*[Patient had accessibility requirements] The pharmacy deliver my medication to my home as I am pregnant.*



## Patient Feedback

Most of the patients lived within 5 to 10-minute walk from the pharmacy and were collecting their prescriptions. They had no concerns regarding accessibility and one patient even mentioned that the pharmacy staff often delivered her medication to her home as she was pregnant.

The patients thought that the facilities and environment of Bell Pharmacy was clean, appreciated the waiting area and had no problems generally. One person mentioned that the space felt a bit small but manageable. **When asked about experience with the pharmacy staff, the patients only had praise.** It was shared that the staff at Bell Pharmacy are very professional, helpful and provide medication appropriately.

The authorised representatives observed that patients did not have to wait long to be seen and were given their prescriptions quickly, appearing organised and efficient in their service delivery.

During the interview, patients were asked if they were aware of the pharmacy's expanded services and whether they would visit a pharmacy instead of the GP Practice for the following reasons: prescriptions; information & advice; contraception; minor illnesses such as a cold, flu, aches, and pains; blood pressure check, and flu vaccination.

About 50% of patients responded 'Yes', they would and have visited the pharmacy for most of the aforementioned services. They shared that they were happy with the service they received. However, the remaining patients were unaware of the enhanced services prior to the interview but were happy to visit the pharmacy for those health concerns.

Overall, the patients have a positive sentiment towards **Bell Pharmacy**, appreciating their kind, efficient and professional service delivery. The interviews increased the general awareness of the enhanced services provided at the pharmacy at a small scale. The point of improvement mentioned by a patient was the **small amount of space at the pharmacy**, albeit manageable.

## Selected Patient Feedback



*I would visit a pharmacy instead of my GP practice for prescriptions, information & advice, minor illnesses such as cold, flu, aches and pains. blood pressure checks and flu vaccinations – I haven't used the services yet as I wasn't aware but would be happy to reach out to Bell Pharmacy.*





# 5. Conclusion

Overall, our visit to Bell Pharmacy was very positive with some areas for improvement identified. Below, we have highlighted our recommendations for improvement based on the observations and the feedback received from both staff and patients.

## Summary of recommendations:

1. Improve the accessibility of the entrance and visibility of pharmacy signboard.
2. Organise posters based on importance and size to increase visibility.
3. Consider escalating the ongoing concerns with referrals from GP practices and eligible patient access to the Selfcare Advice Service.
4. Provide more training opportunities for staff members and implement more robust accessibility accommodation.

## Recommendations

The Manager at Bell Pharmacy was requested to respond to the following recommendations:

### 1. Entrance and Signage

#### Observations:

The management at Bell Pharmacy had temporarily placed a banner over their signboard, which was observed to be difficult to read. Additionally, the new check-out counter being installed near the entrance was perceived to be a potential obstruction for those using wheelchairs or walking frames.

*At the time of the visit, the entryway space was narrow due to the installation process of anti-theft measures. The temporary placement of the table may have limited accessibility for those using a wheelchair or walking frames*

*The pharmacy had a banner over the main signboard, which was difficult to read due to the windy weather.*

## We recommend:

- Healthwatch Tower Hamlets were advised that the signboard was a temporary measure, ensuring that the new signboard appropriate shows the pharmacy's name and information.
- Rearranging the new counter so that it does not cause an issue for those using wheelchairs, walking frames and pushchairs.

## Manager Response:

*We appreciate your feedback on the entrance and signage. The banner currently in place is a temporary measure while we await installation of our permanent, professionally designed signboard. The new signage will clearly display the pharmacy name and contact information and will be securely fitted to avoid any weather-related visibility issues.*

*Regarding the check-out counter and temporary table near the entrance: we acknowledge this may have temporarily impacted accessibility. These fixtures have since been repositioned to ensure a clear pathway for patients using wheelchairs, walking frames, and pushchairs. We have reviewed the layout to ensure future installations do not obstruct access*

## 2. Information Displayed and Feedback Mechanism

### Observations:

The information displayed could be improved in its positioning based on the importance and size. A few posters which were perceived to be important, such as the 24 Minor Ailments and the Feedback and Complaints Procedure, were observed in less visible areas. We were also informed that there was a lack of a robust feedback mechanism at the pharmacy.

*Whilst there was a great variation of posters at the premises, room for display was limited and inappropriate at times. The authorised representative noticed that an A4 poster highlighting the 24 Minor Ailments treated at the pharmacy was displayed incredibly low to the ground, making it inaccessible to patients.*

*The Healthwatch Tower Hamlets team had observed the feedback and complaints procedure poster displayed at the pharmacy with poor visibility. In support, 60% of staff were unsure or did not think that it was displayed in a visible location.*

*Methods for collecting feedback consisted mostly of verbal exchanges, encouraging patients to leave comments on their website or Google Reviews or send any queries via email. A staff member shared that the pharmacy did not have an in-house feedback mechanism.*

## We recommend:

- Reconfigure the arrangement of posters at Bell Pharmacy based on importance and size.
- Ensuring that all staff members are aware of the location of the feedback and complaints procedure poster.
- Actively encouraging patients to leave feedback by scanning a QR code that leads them directly to the appropriate webpage for ease. This will be the first step in building an in-house feedback mechanism.

## Manager Response:

*We are in the process of reorganising our display areas. Key posters, including the "24 Minor Ailments" and "Feedback and Complaints Procedure,"*

*We have briefed all staff members on the updated locations of these materials to ensure they can direct patients appropriately.*

*Additionally, we are working to implement a digital feedback system that includes a QR code displayed at multiple locations within the pharmacy. This will direct patients to our online feedback form, improving accessibility and helping us build a more robust in-house feedback mechanism.*

## 3. Patient Referrals from GP Practices

### Observations:

Staff at Bell Pharmacy voiced their concerns regarding low patient referrals from GP practices and CPSAS accessibility for their eligible patients. They also felt that patients were not sufficiently informed and reassured of the expanded services provided by pharmacists.

*During a short interview with the lead pharmacist, it was shared that referrals from GP practices remained low despite attempts to communicate with the practices, leading to the involvement of the LPC (Local Pharmaceutical Committee). Concerns were also raised regarding the Community Pharmacy Selfcare Advice Service and accessibility to eligible patients.*

*There was a recurring call for GP practices to sufficiently inform their patients of the services available at pharmacies, actively referring patients with minor ailments for pharmacy consultations and provide updated information regarding schemes that patients were eligible for.*

## We recommend:

- Escalating the issue of communication with local GP practices to the respective Primary Care Network (PCN) managers and the Community Pharmacy England (CPE). Healthwatch Tower Hamlets recognises that accessibility to healthcare is a priority, especially where it concerns vulnerable patients who are eligible to government schemes.
- Updating Healthwatch Tower Hamlets on the resolution progression so that we can help Bell Pharmacy where possible.

## Manager Response:

*We share your concern regarding the low referral rates from GP practices. We have formally escalated this matter to our PCN lead and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC). Additionally, we will be contacting Community Pharmacy England (CPE) to explore further support in addressing this gap.*

*We will update Healthwatch Tower Hamlets as we make progress and would welcome any assistance or advocacy you can provide to support better collaboration between local GP practices and pharmacies for the benefit of our community.*

## 4. Staff Training and Accessible Information Standard

### Observations:

The need for further training was clearly voiced by the staff at Bell Pharmacy. However, workload constraints were perceived to be a limitation. Assistance available for those with hearing, visual or learning impairments was unclear.

*57% of staff felt that more training should be provided. However, due to how busy the pharmacy gets, it has been difficult to train new staff in-house.*

*Accessibility arrangements for those with hearing, visual or learning impairments were unclear and not explicitly shared with Healthwatch Tower Hamlets staff*

## We recommend:

- Allocating further training modules to staff members who feel it is necessary to further their career goals. To work around limitations due to workload pressures, consider scheduling training at different times (out-of-hours) or formats where appropriate.
- As per the Accessible Information Standard ([AIS](#)), Bell Pharmacy should work on a plan on how they aim to meet the needs of those with hearing, visual and/or learning impairments. The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has an informative [article](#) outlining how to navigate this. If there is an existing plan in place, ensure all staff members are aware and actively practice it in their service delivery.

### Manager Response:

*We fully support the need for ongoing training and development. We are currently reviewing our staff rota to allow dedicated training time during quieter periods and are exploring online training modules that staff can complete flexibly.*

*In alignment with the Accessible Information Standard, we are developing a clear plan to ensure that we can effectively meet the needs of patients with hearing, visual, or learning impairments.*

*We would like to extend a thank you to Bell Pharmacy for their contributions to this  
Enter and View Report.*



# 6. Appendix

This section displays additional photos taken during the Enter and View Visit to Bell Pharmacy on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2024.



*Appendix A: A blood pressure machine for independent use by patients was observed in the consultation room.*



*Appendix B: An A4 poster highlighting the 24 Minor Ailments treated at the pharmacy was displayed incredibly low to the ground, making it inaccessible to patients.*





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