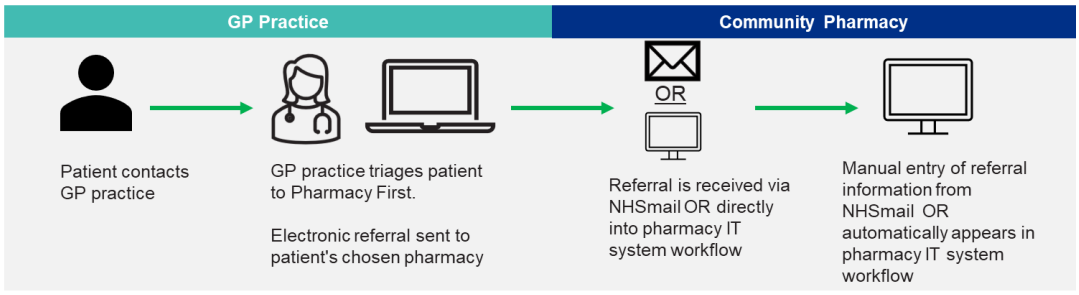
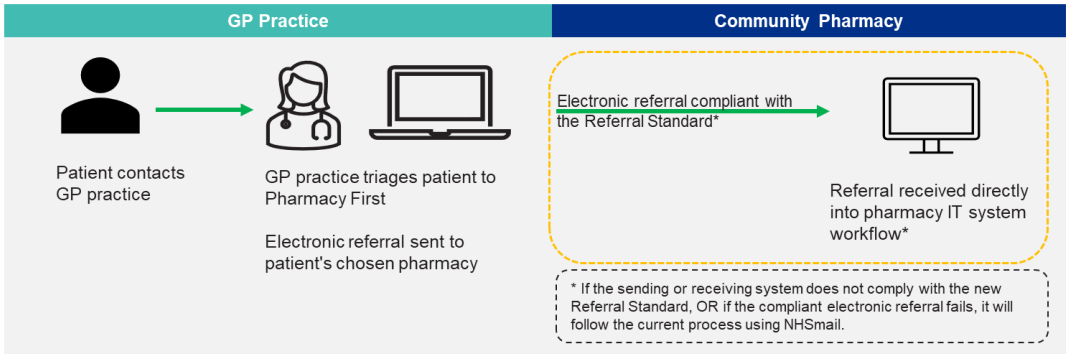
Pharmacy First: Referral Standard FAQs - 5 September 2024

1.	**What is the Referral Standard?** The Referral Standard is part of the Booking and Referral Standard (BaRS), which is an interoperability standard that sets out the required information and rules for digitally transferring patient information between healthcare services. BaRS referrals include the patient information needed in a clinically safe and standardised format for the patient's ongoing care. The Referral Standard is a technical change to connect general practice and community pharmacy. It enables a general practice to send Pharmacy First minor illness and clinical pathway referral information directly from GP IT systems into community pharmacy IT systems. More information is available on the BaRS website
2.	**Why is NHS England implementing the Referral Standard for referrals from general practice to community pharmacy?** NHS England and the Department for Health and Social Care committed in the Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (May 2023) to "work with community pharmacy suppliers and general practice suppliers to develop and deliver interoperable digital solutions". We want to release time and reduce administration burden for frontline teams to improve patients experience and patient safety.
3.	**Is sending patient referrals from general practice to community pharmacy new?** No, general practices have been able to refer patients to the community pharmacy minor illness service, which is now part of the Pharmacy First service, since October 2019. The introduction of the Referral Standard means that more community pharmacies will receive these referrals directly into their IT system workflows instead of by NHSmail. The diagram below shows the current (as-is) process to refer a patient to a community pharmacy and shows the Referral Standard process from general practice to a community pharmacy:

	Current as-is referral process  **Referral process using a system that complies with the Referral Standard** 
4.	**What are the benefits of the Referral Standard?** The Referral Standard streamlines the referral process and enables the transmission of electronic referrals between general practice and community pharmacy IT systems using nationally defined data fields and formats. Benefits to general practice: • Improves patient choice • Improves patient safety • Improves usability Benefits to community pharmacy: • Saves administrative time • Improves patient safety • Increases visibility of referrals • Reduces the need to copy referral information from NHSmail • Improves patient experience • Reduces the need for patients to repeat information
5.	**What changes will general practice teams see with the introduction of the Referral Standard?** The Referral Standard itself does not change the way a general practice makes a referral; it is a messaging standard which streamlines and enhances the receipt of the referral by the community pharmacy.

	General practice teams should continue to follow local referral processes and will still have access to NHSmail to send referrals as a back-up or until their IT supplier has rolled out the Referral Standard. There is no change for a general practice using EMIS Local Services to send referrals with the introduction of the Referral Standard. However, PharmRefer users will lose the 'cancel referral' feature. At this time, TPP SystmOne users will continue to send referrals using NHSmail or PharmRefer, if they hold a local licence. We are working with TPP to develop and implement the Referral Standard.
6.	**What changes will community pharmacy teams see with the introduction of the Referral Standard?** Referrals sent from general practice via PharmRefer and EMIS Web Local Services will go directly into the community pharmacy IT system. This is the same process for what happens with referrals from NHS111. Other referrals will continue to arrive via NHSmail. Community pharmacies will need to continue to check their NHSmail.
7.	**Which general practice IT suppliers and systems are compliant with the Referral Standard?** GP IT Systems that are currently assured: • EMIS Web Local Services • EMIS PharmRefer We will provide national updates as other suppliers are assured.
8.	**Which community pharmacy IT suppliers and systems are compliant with the Referral Standard?** Community pharmacy IT systems that are currently assured: • Cegedim (Pharmacy Services), • EMIS (PharmOutcomes), • Positive Solutions (HxConsult) Sonar Health will complete assurance shortly.
9.	**What do general practice and community pharmacies need to do to switch on the Referral Standard?** Compliant IT system suppliers will notify their customers and issue guidance ahead of the Referral Standard being deployed. The suppliers will automatically upgrade their IT systems.