

Paper 2: Correspondence with Oakham Medical Practice

Letters exchanged between the advisory board of HWR and Oakham Medical Practice

1. From HWR to OMP 17/9:

Dr. Lucy Pearson

By email

17 September 2025

Dear Dr. Pearson,

Thank you very much for providing Healthwatch Rutland (HWR) with regular updates about the Practice's management of converting as many patients as possible to electronic ordering of their repeat prescriptions. We fully understand that this is a valuable saving of resources for the surgery staff and is part of the NHS plan to move from analogue to digital. We also recognise that electronic ordering of repeat prescriptions is easy and very convenient for many patients.

Part of the role of Healthwatch is to act as 'critical friend' for commissioners and providers of our health and care services. In this role, the Advisory Board of Healthwatch Rutland has been watching the progress of the Practice towards a more digital use of medicines management with both interest and some concern.

Our understanding of the situation from the meeting on 9 Sept with yourself, Fiona Williams and Tracey from HWR is as follows:

- Pharmacies are mandated to move to paperless prescription management within the next 12-18 months.
- The practice estimates that 9.3% of its registered patients have no online access and will continue to support these patients to continue with paper reordering.
- There is recognition that some patients may not be able to reorder electronically and families and carers will be encouraged to do so on their behalf.
- There has been a positive result in reducing the number of people using paper to reorder their repeat prescriptions.

As a result, the following actions are planned:

- The repeat prescription box will now be moved back into the reception area for patient access.
- Patients are expected to use online reordering unless they have been assessed as not being able to do so.
- Patients who have been assessed as unable to reorder electronically will continue to be able to submit paper requests.
- Patients who have not been assessed as unable to use electronic methods will receive a text message advising them that they will receive one more repeat prescription ordered by paper but, thereafter, they will only be able to reorder electronically. The text message will be accompanied by details of how to access electronic requests/get help or to request eligibility for paper requests. If they do not respond, the Practice will contact with them by other means to arrange an assessment.

The HWR Board's concerns, comments and questions are:

- We were first alerted to the push towards electronic reordering of prescriptions by the strong reactions of protest to the removal of the outside posting box for paper prescriptions in the Spring of 2025. We encourage the Practice to approach future communications with sensitivity, ensuring patients feel respected and well-informed. Thoughtful messaging will be key to maintaining and strengthening the trust that has recently begun to recover among patients and the wider community. The offer for HWR to review proposed text messages and other communications with patients and volunteers stands.
- We also encourage the Practice to site the prescription box at a suitable height for use by wheelchair users.
- We would be grateful if you could provide us with details of the assessment – how it will be carried out and what rights of appeal patients will have.
- For some people, giving responsibility of reordering to carers/family members may be a relief. However, for others, it might risk undermining patient dignity, autonomy and confidentiality. It also raises questions about whether carers or relatives have the time and capacity to take on this task? Thus, we would welcome some reassurance about the legalities of the move to digital and whether the Practice is allowed contractually to refuse the choice of paper prescription repeats for patients/families that want it. Further to this, how will the Practice manage patients who are assessed as able to engage electronically but refuse to do so?

We hope that the Practice will understand that we have written this letter to represent the patient position, help the practice and to seek reassurance that an inclusive approach and sensitive language will be used in communicating the changes.

You may be aware of the recent media article about my comments at the Health and Wellbeing Board last week during the section on the Pharmaceutical Needs Assessment. Whilst the body of the article accurately reflects the discussion about prescription management, the headline wholly misrepresents it and is misleading to readers. At no point did I suggest that people who do not use online ordering will wait longer for their prescriptions to be processed.

We have urged the reporter to revise the headline and remove further reference in the body text, and would like to reassure you that we support your efforts to move people online, with the caveats that we outline above.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Janet Underwood PhD

Chair, Healthwatch Rutland

2. OMP reply to HWR 30/9:

Tracey Allan-Jones, by email

30th September 2025

Dear Tracey,

Sorry for our delay in responding to your letter dated 17th September 2025. As I am sure you can appreciate, we needed time to digest and formulate a response to the misrepresentation and inaccuracies published in the article, following comments from the chair of Healthwatch Rutland (HWR).

Whilst we acknowledge HWR have urged the reporter to revise the headline, we have not seen evidence that the request has come to fruition and so would urge HWR to issue a statement making the public aware of these

inaccuracies and thus work towards rectifying the damage the article has caused, not only to our reputation, but to our staff morale.

We have always been open, honest and welcoming with HWR and have worked with you in your role as 'critical friend'. However, in this instance, we disagree with your approach and feel you are disadvantaging our patients.

The 10-year plan is focused on the switch from analogue to digital; we are being forced to engage with all manner of digital advances. HWR should be using their position to teach and reassure patients that the digital approach to prescription management is safer and more efficient. Instead, the position of HWR has possibly caused irreparable damage to our reputation and potentially undone the efforts of our staff, who have been educating patients on the way modern general practice must function for the future.

We would welcome a formal investigation into how inaccurate information was presented as fact at the Health and Wellbeing Board. It is our understanding that Dr Underwood has not attended any meetings with us where we have discussed our management of repeat prescriptions and so her concerns should have been raised with us before they were discussed at a public meeting.

Unfortunately, until we are satisfied an investigation has been conducted and the revision of the article has been completed, we feel we can no longer engage with HWR.

Yours sincerely,

The Partners at Oakham Medical Practice.

3. HWR response to OMP 8/10:

Partners of Oakham Medical Practice
By email

8 October 2025

Dear Dr Pearson and Partners,

Thank you for your letter dated 30 September.

We appreciate your recognition of Healthwatch Rutland as a critical friend and regret that you feel our approach may have disadvantaged your patients. We share your frustration at the local media article in The Rutland Times where the reporter misrepresented our Chair's comments at the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWB) meeting, thereby causing you this concern.

As you are aware, in our recent discussions regarding the transition to digital prescription management, we have clearly supported the Practice's move in this direction and helped communicate the benefits to patients through our website, agreeing joint messaging with your Practice Manager.

At the same time, we have made efforts to represent patient concerns about potential inequalities for those less able to engage digitally, as part of our statutory duty to voice patient perspectives. This was the core of Dr. Underwood's remarks at the Health and Wellbeing Board on 9 September.

Unfortunately, her comments were misreported by a local newspaper, the Rutland Times. We promptly initiated an investigation of events and contacted Illiffe Media, cautioning that the inaccuracies could cause unnecessary patient anxiety and harm trust in local GP services. Our findings include:

1. The HWB meeting recording confirms that OMP, or any other practice, was never mentioned by name. Dr Underwood's actual comments can be heard here from around 25 minutes and 40 seconds: [Rutland Health and Wellbeing Board - 9 September 2025 - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JyfJyfJyfJy)

2. The Rutland Times article published on 18 September inaccurately represented Dr. Underwood's comments; as the recording shows, she did not suggest that patients who do not use online ordering would experience longer prescription wait times.
3. Dr. Underwood explicitly supported the benefits of online services for those who can use them while stressing the importance of not disadvantaging those who cannot.
4. Iliffe Media promptly corrected articles on Lincs Online and in the Rutland and Stamford Mercury at our request. However, the Rutland Times had already gone to print; we therefore requested a printed correction in the following issue.
5. On 18 September, we published clarifying statements for the public [on our website](#) and social media channels (Facebook and Twitter).
6. The Rutland Times correction has been in the public domain for 2 weeks, appearing on page 3 of the 25 September edition (copied below for your convenience).

While Dr Underwood did not personally attend meetings with the Practice throughout the summer regarding patient concerns about the transition to digital prescription management, I have ensured that my discussions with you were fully conveyed and understood by the Healthwatch Rutland Board, as is standard practice within Healthwatch. At the HWB Dr Underwood sought to offer a balanced perspective on both the benefits and the concerns of vulnerable patients arising from the transition to digital prescription management. Unfortunately, the misreporting of her comments and subsequent repercussions has caused her understandable distress.

We trust this explanation and our history of collaboration reassure you that there has never been any intention on our part to damage the reputation of the Practice. We hope to continue to work with the Practice to ensure a safe and equitable migration to digital healthcare, which delivers efficiencies and benefits to the Practice whilst safeguarding the needs of patients who are more vulnerable and unable to engage digitally.

In the spirit of collaboration, we would appreciate an update on the progress of the arrangements for re-siting the prescription box and would also welcome clarification on the process available to patients who wish to appeal their assessment.

Looking ahead, we are currently scoping engagement around Rutland patients' experiences of hospital discharge. We hope to collaborate with Practices across Rutland, including OMP, to gain insight into how discharge processes operate in practice from the perspective of both patients and General Practice.

In conclusion, we hope that this misunderstanding is now resolved and we can move forward in a positive way.

Your sincerely,



Tracey Allan-Jones

Manager, Healthwatch Rutland

Rutland Times, page 3, 25 September 2025:

Healthwatch Rutland

In an article last week about Healthwatch Rutland, the headline and reporting suggested an unnamed GP surgery delayed prescriptions ordered offline.

We have been asked by Healthwatch Rutland to point out this is not what it had suggested, nor is it the case.

Healthwatch said it

acknowledged digital services can be easier for many, but emphasised the need to not disadvantage those unable to access them.

As stated correctly in the article, patients at a Rutland practice over the summer have had to queue to hand over paper prescriptions. Healthwatch has spoken to the practice concerned and

knows the measures were undertaken for a short period to try to encourage people to move to digital.

Healthwatch has reiterated that the move to digital services is a national push, but face-to-face and telephone options remain available and must be safeguarded.

4. OMP response to HWR 3/12:

Healthwatch Rutland

By email

3rd December 2025

Dear Dr Underwood (Chair HWR)

Thank you for your letter dated 17th September and the subsequent letter from Tracey Allan-Jones dated 8th October.

Please find below our progress report regarding paper prescriptions:

1. We moved the box back into reception, but patients started leaning over the desks and were then able to have sight of the computer screen causing issues with confidentiality. It has therefore been re sited next to the Patient Services Team Member at the front desk
2. Patients have continued to move to using the online facility and are encouraged to do so by face-to-face help or links to the online facility when they submit a paper request
3. Patients assessed as unable to do so have this identified on their notes and can proceed to use paper requests
4. Patients not assessed are messaged detailing the plan and a link sent when we receive a paper request, asking them to use the online format or contact us for an assessment.
5. If patients refuse to use the online request but are evidenced as able to use the online format (having used it for another reason, have the NHS APP or responded via the online format to our message) information in the recent patient charter is sent to them:

“As per the government’s new advice patients are being asked “How can you help your general practice?”

Be prepared

Be on time

Cancel if needed

Use the NHS App or website

Turn on notifications

Order repeat medicines on time

6. When we moved the box there had been a sign on it for months advising patients of the need to use online requests from the 1.4.25 and education was provided if needed. We had given patients a considerable lead time and messaging to move over to online requests and/ or ask for help.
7. The assessment involves:
 - a message to the patient via a smart phone friendly text message requesting a reply – if a patient replies then they have the technology to use the online facility, and further information is sent to them on how to move to this format.
 - Past use of the online consultation facility allows confirmation that they have accessed the website and can use this format.
 - Access and login to the NHS App.

Anyone without evidence of these is contacted by our Medicine Management Team to investigate the ability to use online requests further.

8. The government charter supports our request for patients to use online requests. It is hard to acquiesce to a patients request to use paper requests when they are booking appointments online, completing online consultations and have online access to their records via their NHS App.

As a government funded body using public money to provide services, we should be aspiring to and expected to strive for more effective, efficient and safer processing of prescriptions.

Having met with Tracey on 25.11.25 it appears that since September, HWR has only had one complaint regarding paper prescriptions and we have not had any, so hopefully this implies our wording, education and processes are working in this move forward.

Kind regards

Dr Lucy Pearson