Pharmacy at risk in plans to cut funding

The only pharmacy in Pateley Bridge could be forced to cut staff and services if changes to Government funding go ahead.

Pateley Bridge Pharmacy customers may have to travel to Ripon or Grassington if £100m in NHS cash paid to run chemists in England is removed.

Samina Khan, who has been a pharmacist in Pateley Bridge for more than eight years, said: "The Government needs to understand pharmacies like Pateley Bridge are an important aspect of the community and funding should not be cut.

"If they cut funding it's taking away the wages of members of staff.

"I'm hoping we won't close but there is a risk of job cuts and services being cut - for example, we go out and visit patients in hospital.

"Quite a lot of our patients are elderly or live on their own and we can be their first port of call. We have built a strong relationship with them by supporting them in times of need."

She said other businesses in the town had asked for copies of a petition to hand out to their customers, concerned that there would be a knock-on effect if services at the prominent High Street pharmacy were cut back.

The petition has received around 1,500 signatures locally and can be found at Pateley Bridge Pharmacy or online at www.supportyourlocalpharmacy.org.

Jack Davies, chief executive of Community Pharmacy North Yorkshire, which represents all NHS pharmacy contractors, estimated that 250-300 pharmacies across the country could be affected by the cuts.

He said the Government's changes were similar to the recently scrapped proposals to force all schools to become academies.

"It is mostly small pharmacies that will be affected."
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"In some cases opening it up to markets will be viable, but Somita will have to decide if it’s financially viable or not."

Local pharmacies rely on the NHS for 90 per cent of their income, receiving an average of £120,000, mostly through fees for handling prescriptions. The Department of Health said there were concerns over the efficiency of the consultation process, which could lead to confusion and uncertainty. The consultation on the plans ended in October and the campaign led by Richard Corbett MP, who visited Patley Bridge Pharmacy on Tuesday, said: "Some pharmacists will succeed, with difficulties, but others like Patley Bridge may be forced to close."

"Some cuts will end up costing patients money and other parts of the NHS, while others won’t be passed on to customers in terms of travel. It’s a false saving."

The changes could come into effect by October but campaigns are hoping for a stay of execution.