Gone are the days when the local pharmacy was simply a place to pick up prescriptions. In high streets, neighbourhood centres and many supermarkets, community pharmacies have undergone a quiet revolution. Today, more than a place to pick up a packet of pills, they provide a whole package of care including a medicine MOT. And as Rob Darracott, chief executive at Pharmacy Voice explains, this is good news for any one with epilepsy.
Latest information shows that every day some 1.8 million people in England visit a pharmacy. Ninety-nine per cent of the population can get to their local pharmacy within 20 minutes by car and 96% by walking or using public transport. This is true even in rural and deprived areas.

Pharmacies are now established as an integrated part of the NHS at the heart of the community, with many open for longer hours than other health care professionals. And the range of services they offer often make them a first port of call for advice on common health concerns.

‘A medicine MOT provides a perfect opportunity for an in-depth conversation with a pharmacist’

The traditional dispensing role of the pharmacist has been developed to include additional services. These range from repeat prescription dispensing services; disposal of unwanted medicine; promotion of healthy lifestyle through advice and information – including learning more about long-term health conditions such as epilepsy; signposting to services from other healthcare professionals; and support for self care for all the family.

But perhaps one of the most important developments for those with epilepsy has been the introduction of Medicines Use Reviews (MURs), also known as a medicine check up or medicine MOT. This service is available throughout England and Wales and a similar scheme, ‘Managing your Medicines’ is offered in Northern Ireland. Scotland offers ‘Chronic Medication Service’ which aims to increase medicines understanding for patients with long-term health conditions.

What is an MUR?
An MUR is a personal and private NHS consultation with your pharmacist to help you improve understanding of your medicines and get the maximum benefit from them. You may want to discuss the anti-epileptic drugs (AEDs) you have been prescribed, any problems or side effects you are experiencing or even whether there is a more effective way of taking them.

For most people, taking medicines will be trouble free but problems can occur. You may have several different AEDs to take at different times of the day and find this difficult to manage. Your tablets may be hard to swallow or may not be compatible with other medicines or foods. Or you may be experiencing side effects from one or more of your drugs. An MUR is the ideal place to raise these issues.

You can ask your pharmacist questions about your medicines at any time, particularly if you have an urgent problem, but an MUR provides a perfect opportunity for an in-depth conversation with a pharmacist in a private consultation room. It can also lead to a reduction in waste if doses or orders change following a consultation. (£100 million worth of drugs are returned to pharmacies unused every year.)

How do you arrange an MUR?
You may be invited for a review by your pharmacist, either in person or by letter, or you can ask for a review at the pharmacy where you normally pick up your prescription, although you must have been getting your prescription there for three months or more. The consultation is completely free, often with no appointment necessary.

What will happen during the consultation?
Your pharmacist will listen to your concerns and answer your questions but it’s important to remember that they will only know about the medicines you have received from that pharmacy. They will not have a record of medicines prescribed by a hospital, nor will they have access to your medical records. So it’s important to tell them as much as you know.

Make sure you have a note of all the medicines you take, what you take them for, how much and how often. If possible take the medicine with you. Your pharmacist will discuss how you are getting on with the medication, whether it is working and whether you have any concerns such as side effects.

It is also your chance to ask questions. For example will the medication still be effective if I have a stomach upset? Will it clash with other drugs I have been prescribed? Can I be certain the drug is safe for me to take? Are there any other treatment options? Do I really need to take all these AEDs? Is there anything that will help to remind me to take these medicines?

‘£100 million worth of drugs are returned to pharmacies unused every year’

Your pharmacist will then draw up an action plan, recording what took place during the meeting and what you agreed together. Both you and your GP will receive a copy. If you think it would be useful, you can also ask for another copy to be sent to a health professional such as a epilepsy specialist nurse or your carer.

If your pharmacist recommends a change to your prescription, this will need to be agreed by you and the person who prescribes your medicine – usually your GP. No changes will be made without your consent.

Pharmacy Voice represents community pharmacists and aims to help shape their services for the future, improving health outcomes for members of the public and value for the NHS.