

PAGB press release: 24th January 2008

Should a 21st century health service be about GPs seeing people with coughs and colds?

Groundbreaking new research, into the impact of minor ailments on GP workload, has led PAGB and PSNC to join forces in a call for the implementation of a National Minor Ailment Programme.

The survey, commissioned by PAGB and conducted by IMS, reveals that the treatment of minor ailments accounts for 18-20% of GP workload, incurring a significant cost of around £2 billion a year to the NHS. A huge 57 million consultations are for minor ailments (51.4 million of which are for minor ailments alone), resulting in over an hour a day for every GP and 52 million prescriptions.

This evidence supports the belief held by PAGB and PSNC that it is now time for a National Minor Ailment Programme where:

- The pharmacist is seen as an integral part of the NHS service
- The pharmacy is the first port of call for all cases of minor ailments
- Responsible self care and self-medication is supported and encouraged
- Reassurance and advice or referral to another part of the NHS is available, when the pharmacist considers it appropriate
- There is a supply of treatments on the NHS for people who are exempt from the prescription charge
- National, regional and local communications by government, PCTs, pharmacies, the voluntary sector and the OTC industry support the programme, with consistent messages.
- There is support from all health professionals, including GPs

- People are recruited into self care through the use of tools in general practice, such as a 'self care prescription'

The benefits of such a programme are enormous and would include a reduction in cost for the already over-burdened NHS, increased capacity for GPs of at least an hour a day, and for the patient, improved access to advice, support and treatment.

Sheila Kelly, PAGB Executive Director, commented: "A 21st century NHS will need to be used by people who can both behave independently and know when an NHS intervention is most effective. Is it one that deals with coughs and colds, or is it one that deals with the more complex needs of a modern population? It must now be time to consider a shift in behaviour from GP to self care and pharmacy as the first point of call for minor ailments."

Sue Sharpe, PSNC Chief Executive Officer, added: "A minor ailments programme can release significant capacity in the GP surgery and build capacity in the pharmacy. It is a great opportunity to use the skills of the pharmacy team to develop the public's understanding of healthy behaviours and confidence in managing health problems, and to ensure that health needs are met in the most cost-effective way."

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