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NICE short clinical guideline on reducing antibiotic prescribing for respiratory tract infections could go further

PAGB welcomes the new NICE guidance on the appropriate prescribing of antibiotics for respiratory tract infections (RTIs) in adults and children in primary care, but believes the guideline could have gone further.

PAGB responded to the consultation for this guideline and is pleased to see that the recommendation to check the patient's previous self medication history has been included.

Gopa Mitra, PAGB Director of Health Policy and Public Affairs, comments: "PAGB has previously run campaigns to educate consumers that antibiotics don't work on coughs and colds, and is pleased that this message is now being reiterated to health professionals.

PAGB's research has shown that people abandon self care and self medication for doctor care too early in the onset of RTIs. Checking patient's previous self medication history and informing them of the likely normal duration of RTIs is a major step towards educating people to self care and self medicate for the appropriate length of time.

In the absence of an antibiotic being prescribed, offering patients advice about what they can do to help themselves in symptom relief can be a positive endorsement of self care. Without this, the consultation will be around a negative situation where an antibiotic, even if it is not needed but expected, is being withheld. A positive offer would overcome any feelings of being short changed on the part of the patient, while at the same time empowering patients to be more independent in the care of their symptoms.

However, it's disappointing that the guideline did not go further and explicitly endorse the pharmacist as the first port of call for advice on symptomatic relief of these minor illnesses. This would have been a clear front runner for joined up health policy linking to the Pharmacy White Paper's aim of the pharmacy being the first port of call for minor ailments."

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