

# CAN WE AFFORD **NOT** TO SELF CARE?

Empowering people to take control of their health

## THE NHS IS UNDER PRESSURE

In the last five years there has been an estimated 285 million GP consultations and more than 10 million visits to Accident & Emergency departments for minor ailments – such as coughs and colds or muscular pain – costing the NHS over £10 billion.<sup>1,2</sup>

## THE PROBLEM IS GETTING WORSE

There has been a 50% increase in the number of people using A&E services within the past decade, while GPs are managing 370m consultations a year, 150,000 more per day than five years ago.<sup>3,4</sup> This additional pressure on already overstretched GPs and A&E departments is having a negative impact on patient outcomes, increasing waiting times and creating workforce problems. With an ageing population, growing numbers of people with long-term conditions and an increase in lifestyle-related diseases, this pressure on the health system will only become more intense.

## THERE ARE SOLUTIONS

The next government and the NHS must do more to support people to take responsibility for their own health and self-treat minor ailments effectively, with pharmacists' advice. This will result in a healthier population, a stronger workforce and a more sustainable NHS.

## WHAT IS SELF CARE?

Self Care is defined, by the Self Care Forum, as a lifelong habit for patients and the public dealing appropriately, effectively and safely with their own minor ailments and long term conditions, taking preventative measures to stay fit, and maintaining good physical and mental health and wellbeing.

## WE WANT TO SEE:

- 1 Public education campaigns to raise awareness of self care
- 2 Consistent messaging about self care and signposting to appropriate health services
- 3 People-centred regulation for OTC medicines
- 4 National leadership for self care
- 5 Specific indicators for self care in the Public Health Outcomes Framework
- 6 Significant improvements in health literacy



**MORE THAN 150,000 GP APPOINTMENTS A DAY**

ARE SPENT TREATING MINOR CONDITIONS LIKE COUGHS, COLDS AND MUSCULAR PAIN.!

## 1. PUBLIC EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS TO RAISE AWARENESS OF SELF CARE

Too many people are relying on the wrong NHS services to treat minor ailments, which are responsible for 57 million GP consultations and 3.7 million visits to A&E departments every year.<sup>1,5</sup> This costs the NHS nearly £2.3 billion and creates significant additional pressure on GP and A&E services, affecting those patients with serious long term conditions who need urgent medical attention.<sup>1,5</sup> Many people do not know how to self care, and are unsure which conditions can be safely managed with the support of a pharmacist. Public Health England should implement public education campaigns which aim to significantly increase awareness of self care and empower people to treat minor ailments effectively.

## 2. CONSISTENT MESSAGING ABOUT SELF CARE AND SIGNPOSTING TO APPROPRIATE HEALTH SERVICES

The NHS provides inconsistent information about self care and where to access support for minor ailments, creating confusion and unnecessary pressure on GP and A&E services. It is essential that people receive consistent information from NHS 111 and NHS Choices that pharmacy is the first port of call for minor ailments. Frontline healthcare professionals should reinforce the message that people should seek to self care for at least 10 days before visiting a healthcare professional, unless they experience a red flag symptom. If people are supported and advised to self care by healthcare professionals they will repeat this behaviour the next time that they experience those symptoms.

## 3. PEOPLE-CENTRED REGULATION FOR OTC MEDICINES

Over the counter (OTC) medicines and supplements play a vital role in supporting people to effectively self treat common conditions, from coughs and colds to hay fever, and to maintain a healthy lifestyle. However, evidence suggests that packaging does not provide people with the information that they need to make effective decisions about which medicines are right for them. Current regulations are designed with healthcare professionals in mind and manufacturers are prevented from empowering people with information about which treatments to use and how to self care effectively. The MHRA should work in partnership with patients and consumer experts to better understand how people make decisions about which OTC medicines to use, and to introduce new people-centred guidelines for packaging, advertising and online engagement to reduce the burden on the NHS.

## 4. NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR SELF CARE

Implementation of self care policy has not been prioritised in the NHS and responsibility for improving population-wide health and empowering people is not joined-up. To drive long term behaviour change, where people become fully engaged in their health, it will be essential to ensure that self care is a national priority and is effectively embedded across the NHS. The Department of Health should appoint a dedicated lead for self care to provide necessary leadership and to coordinate the work of NHS England, Public Health England and government departments.

HEALTH INFORMATION IS TOO COMPLEX FOR MORE THAN 60% OF WORKING AGE ADULTS IN ENGLAND TO UNDERSTAND.<sup>6</sup>

## 5. SPECIFIC INDICATORS FOR SELF CARE IN THE PUBLIC HEALTH OUTCOMES FRAMEWORK

The Public Health Outcomes Framework sets objectives for improving healthy living, however there are currently no specific indicators for measuring the adoption of self care behaviour. The Department of Health should include specific indicators in Domain 2 of the Public Health Outcomes Framework which aim to measure awareness of self care initiatives at a local level and the number of people who are unnecessarily visiting GP and A&E departments for minor ailments. This will ensure that Directors of Public Health, CCGs and national health bodies work together to deliver long term change.

## 6. SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENTS IN HEALTH LITERACY

Evidence indicates that health information is currently too complex for more than 60% of working age adults in England to understand.<sup>6</sup> Encouraging more individuals to take responsibility for their own health will require significant improvements in health literacy. The focus must be on ensuring that children receive the basic information and tools to self care effectively throughout their lives. Public Health England and the Department for Education should ensure that education about self care and healthy lifestyles is a key part of the national curriculum, as a mandatory element of Personal, Social and Health Education, in order to drive a long term change in behaviour.

### PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain)

is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of branded over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and food supplements. Established in 1919, PAGB's mission is to create and support an environment in which people feel empowered to take charge of their own health and wellbeing and make informed decisions based on better choice and information.

If you would like more information please contact

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OR 020 7242 8331

1 IMS Health, Minor ailment workload in general practice, 2007.

2 Self Care Forum, Over 2 million unnecessary A&E visits "wasted", 2012.

3 Royal College of General Practitioners, New league table reveals GP shortages across England, as patients set to wait week or more to see family doctor on 67m occasions. 2015.

4 NHS England, High quality care for all, now and for future generations: Transforming urgent and emergency care services in England, The Evidence Base from the Urgent and Emergency Care Review, 2013.

5 IMS Health study of self-treatable conditions presenting in A&E units 2014. Data Source: HES data. Health Episode Statistics. Re-used with the permission of the Health and Social Care Information Centre. All rights reserved.

6 Royal College of General Practitioners. Health Literacy Report from an RCGP-led health literacy workshop, June 2014.