

MEDIA RELEASE

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New GP ‘recommendation prescriptions’ could help NHS save millions by empowering people to self care for minor illnesses

PAGB is today calling for the introduction of ‘recommendation prescriptions’ to be used by doctors across the UK to help people to self care and reduce pressure on stretched NHS services. The ‘recommendation prescriptions’ are designed for GPs to recommend appropriate over-the-counter (OTC) treatments and self care advice for people with self-treatable conditions.

The NHS is overstretched and facing increasing demand, especially in primary care, where waiting times for GP appointments can be as long as three weeks. NHS officials recently published guidance¹ advising GPs not to prescribe over-the-counter medicines to people with self-treatable conditions and to encourage people to self care, in a move designed to save money and free up GPs’ time to deal with more serious health concerns.

The ‘recommendation prescriptions’ are one of a range of measures PAGB believes are necessary to give people the support they need to self care.

John Smith, PAGB Chief Executive, said: “Our research shows almost a third of people (32%) are visiting the GP for minor health concerns, such as a sore throat² when self care would be much quicker and more convenient for the individual. When asked the reasons why they visited their GP instead of a pharmacist, 42% said it was so they could get a prescription to treat symptoms, and 36% wanted expert healthcare advice².

“This clearly demonstrates a need for these ‘recommendation prescriptions’, which will give people the information they want to be able to self care with confidence.

“OTC medicines play an important role in helping people manage symptoms of self-treatable conditions so they can get on with their day. However, many people lack the knowledge on which medicines are available without a prescription and look to their GP for advice. The NHS is asking GPs to stop prescribing treatments for these conditions, but this needs to be backed up with information and support to help people to self care.”

Practising GP and media medic, Dr Sarah Jarvis, comments: “The introduction of ‘recommendation prescriptions’ is a simple but effective initiative that would support GPs to promote self care. Patients are looking for advice on the best way to treat symptoms and in cases where a prescription is not appropriate, I often write down useful websites or information about OTC medicines on scraps of paper, so a ‘recommendation prescription’ would be useful for me, and would provide my patients with the reassurance they’re looking for.

“In my practice, we routinely ask patients to buy OTC medicines from the pharmacy rather than writing a prescription. We try hard to encourage people not to consult their GP in the first place for minor illnesses, such as conjunctivitis, thrush, and occasional heartburn, but appreciate that some people still want the reassurance of a doctor’s advice.”

The proposed ‘recommendation prescriptions’ would include space for GPs to write details of the minor illness, any self care advice and details of OTC medicines they recommend the patient purchases via a pharmacy, where appropriate.

John Smith adds, “It’s reassuring that the NHS is looking at solutions to encourage people to self care, but more still needs to be done. Supporting people to self care for self-treatable conditions is essential for the future of the NHS, both in terms of reducing costs and demand as well as ensuring people are seen by the right healthcare professional at the right time.”

- ENDS –

Notes to editors:

There are an estimated 57 million GP consultations and 3.7 million visits to A&E every year for minor illnesses, costing the NHS an estimated £2.3 billion^{3,4}. PAGB is confident that the ‘recommendation prescriptions’ will make a positive difference to self care in the UK, saving NHS money and reducing demand on stretched services, following the successful implementation of the Grüne Rezept (Green Prescription) in Germany back in 2004.

Dr Martin Weiser, Director General of BAH, the German Medicines Manufacturers Association, comments: “The introduction of the Grüne Rezept has been very effective in helping people to self care. Research conducted by BAH in November 2016 found that when people were given a Grüne Rezept, 91% purchased the recommended medicine from a pharmacy or online pharmacy, which is very promising to hear. Only 6% said that they did not purchase the medicine. With the Grüne Rezept, people can remember the GP’s recommendation and are enabled to treat themselves when they experience the same symptoms next time. This is an important step to empower people to self care.”

Other measures which PAGB believes should be introduced under a national self care strategy include: tools to empower pharmacists to support self care; policies to make it easier for people to buy over-the-counter (OTC) products e.g. reducing the VAT rate; increasing the number of medicine reclassifications; action to improve health literacy and steps to support people to live healthier lives. [View the full list of PAGB policy priorities.](#)

Pharmacists are expert healthcare professionals who are ideally placed to offer people advice and support on OTC medicines and how to self care for self-treatable conditions.

PAGB defines Self Care as the actions people take for themselves and their families to promote and maintain good health and wellbeing and to take care of their self-treatable conditions.

PAGB (Proprietary Association of Great Britain) is the UK trade association representing manufacturers of branded over-the-counter medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements. www.pagb.co.uk

For further information, please contact Pegasus: Lauren Walker or Amy Skinner on 01273 712000 / PAGB@thisispegasus.co.uk

1 <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/items-which-should-not-be-routinely-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/>

2 Survey of 2,000 UK adults, 3Gem, October 2017

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

4 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.