

MEDIA RELEASE

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PAGB ON SELF CARE WEEK: HEALTH LITERACY IN ENGLAND MUST IMPROVE

- PAGB is calling for self care to be included in healthcare professional training to improve health literacy and ease NHS burden, by empowering people to manage their health better
- Both the public and healthcare professionals should be equipped with knowledge to self care
- Regional strategies already demonstrating the wider benefits of self care training in Manchester
- This year, during Self Care Week people are being encouraged to “Choose Self Care for Life”

PAGB is today calling for self care to be included as a key requirement in professional training for GPs and other healthcare professionals, to help improve health literacy and reduce the burden on the NHS. This recommendation coincides with this year’s Self Care Week launch and is included in a new interim white paper, which calls for a national strategy for self care and details key policy objectives, including nationally improved health literacy.

Concerning figures reveal that health literacy levels in England are significantly low and it is estimated that between 43% and 61% of English working age adults¹ routinely do not understand key information related to their own health. This lack of understanding can have damning impacts, not just on patient health outcomes, but on stretched NHS services and capabilities, as well as contributing to health inequalities. People from more disadvantaged socioeconomic groups have been identified as having levels of health literacy which are disproportionately low or inadequate.

Low health literacy has a direct impact on the NHS and contributes to the strain the health service is currently under. Misunderstanding health advice and information means people are misusing NHS services, as PAGB research reveals 34% of people admit to visiting a GP rather than a pharmacist for self-treatable conditions². Interactions with the NHS, including A&E attendances, GP appointments and prescriptions for over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, that could reasonably be dealt with elsewhere, cost an estimated £1.5 billion, which could be saved each year and re-invested into the NHS if more people were empowered to take care of their own health and self-treat.

PAGB Chief Executive, John Smith says: “We believe that self care is not only the responsibility of the individual but also of healthcare professionals, who need to provide advice and information that people can easily understand to help them identify the right care for their condition. Training healthcare

professionals to support people to self care will improve health literacy and ultimately reduce unnecessary demand on the NHS.

Equipping HCPs with the knowledge and skills to self care should be a key focus of the NHS long-term plan. This would help to ensure a sustainable future, in terms of educating people how to manage self-treatable conditions, but also the complex challenges associated with the management of long-term health concerns, particularly in an ageing population.”

John continues: “There is still more to do to enable GPs to support their patients to self care – the Royal College of General Practitioners conducted a recent study that found that currently just 42% of practices focus on providing self care advice and support. This is despite 67% of GPs believing support for patients to self care would help to reduce their workload³ and ultimately improve the patient experience and health outcomes.”

In some parts of the country, a self care agenda has already been implemented. In Manchester, the benefits of training healthcare professionals in self care have been very positive. Over 200 health and social care practitioners have completed self care training over the past 5 years in North Manchester and of the 106 participants trained by March 2014, 93% reported an increase in confidence in enabling self care.* This has contributed to the city wide strategy of enabling people to access, understand and use the information they need to care for and support their own health and wellbeing.

The PAGB recommendations are set out in ‘A long-term vision for self care: interim white paper’, which has been developed to inform discussions on the new NHS long-term plan and recommends policies that will unlock the potential of self care.

- ENDS -

Notes to editors:

Self Care Week (12-18 November 2018) is an annual national awareness week run by the Self Care Forum that focuses on establishing support for self care across communities, families and generations and the theme this year is ‘**Choosing self care for life**’. More needs to be done to support people to better look after their own health. Empowering individuals to self care has many benefits for their short term and long term health and this is important since people are living longer. Helping people to look after their own health, and their family’s health also helps to manage demand on health services.

For more information visit <http://www.selfcareforum.org/events/self-care-week/>

*Manchester’s Self Care Strategy aims to:

1. Enable people to access, understand and use the information they need to care for and support their own health and wellbeing
2. Enable people to identify lifestyle changes and goals for themselves, improving their physical and mental wellbeing and preventing ill-health

3. Facilitate collaborative decision making between people with physical and mental long-term conditions, their carers and the teams that work with them
4. Facilitate the changes in the system required for enabling self care

In order to support and enable self care the approach of health and care practitioners and providers needs to be;

- **Personalised** - focussed on what matters to the person (person's goal)
- **Asset based** - recognises strengths and abilities (assets) not just illness and problems (deficits)
- **Relational** - based on trust, understanding, empathy and emotional connection, not just the 'transaction' or episode of care
- **Holistic** - services form a sophisticated understanding of a person's particular context, taking their social circumstances into account and addressing these in order to achieve their goals
- **Collaborative** – plans are developed jointly between the practitioner and the person they are supporting. It should also take account of people's level of health literacy; this is the resources individuals need to access, understand, appraise and use information and services to make decisions about their health

To receive a full copy of the white paper, or for further information please contact: Lauren Walker or Maria Boiling on 01273 712000 / PAGB@thisispegasus.co.uk

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

¹ Manchester City Council, 2016, *Manchester Health and Wellbeing Board: report for resolution – Manchester's self care strategy*

² Survey with 5,011 UK adults, carried out by Pureprofile on behalf of the PAGB. Sept 2016.

³ Royal College of General Practitioners, 2018, *Spotlight on the 10 High Impact Actions*