



The Consumer Healthcare Association

20 July 2020

Coronavirus will change attitudes to self care and NHS use, PAGB survey suggests.

ALMOST one in three people say they will use the NHS differently following the coronavirus pandemic, according to a new survey.

The poll by [PAGB](#), the consumer healthcare association, found that A&E and GP services are less likely to be the first port of call for those with self-treatable conditions in future while more people will choose to care for themselves if they can.

The findings suggest the sharp fall in numbers attending A&E departments and GP surgeries during lockdown could pave the way for a longer-term shift away from inappropriate use of NHS resources – and free up huge savings for reinvestment in services - if people feel properly supported and informed about self care.

More than 2,000 adults took part in the survey, which comes in the run-up to [International Self Care Day](#) on 24 July. All had experienced at least one health problem that is normally self-treatable - such as backache, hayfever or a sore throat - since lockdown began in the UK on 23 March.

Among those who previously considered A&E as an acceptable route to access care for generally self-treatable conditions, more than seven out of ten (71%) said it was less likely to be their first option after the coronavirus pandemic.

Among those who previously sought a GP appointment as their first option, more than half (51%) said they were less likely to do so after the pandemic.

In addition:

- Almost seven out of ten respondents (69%) who might not have considered self care as their first option before the pandemic said they were more likely to likely to do so in future;
- Almost one in three people (31%) who would not have visited a pharmacy for advice before seeking help elsewhere said they were more likely to do so following the pandemic;
- Almost one in three people (32%) said the pandemic had changed their attitude to the way they access healthcare services;
- 77% agreed the pandemic should change the way we think about using GP appointments and A&E services;
- 86% agreed that A&E and GP appointments should be used only when absolutely essential – up from 81% in PAGB's 2016 survey of attitudes to self care.

Comments from respondents included: “Now I think twice if it is essential for me to see a GP or go to A&E”; “I do much more self care than before coronavirus”; and: “I’ll trust pharmacy advice more in the future”.

Before the coronavirus outbreak, there were an estimated 18 million GP appointments and 3.7 million A&E visits every year for conditions which people could have treated themselves or for which a pharmacist should have been the first port of call for advice.

The cost to the NHS, along with that of prescriptions for products which could be bought over the counter, is estimated by PAGB at £1.5 billion a year.

GP Dr Sarah Jarvis said:

“It is clear from PAGB’s survey that coronavirus has significantly affected the way people think about the NHS, both in personal terms and more broadly.

“There is strong and welcome support for ensuring that A&E and GP services are used only when absolutely essential, as they have been by the vast majority of people during lockdown.

“The survey also reveals a greater willingness to practise self care and to seek advice from a pharmacist as a first port of call.

“What matters now is to build on these foundations so that people don’t slip back into previous habits despite their best intentions.

“Of course we must make sure that individuals seek expert medical advice when they need to – increasing awareness of the expertise of pharmacists in identifying potentially serious symptoms will help with that.

“But we also need to improve knowledge and understanding of self care so that more people have the necessary tools to look after themselves in the first instance, rather than turning automatically to a GP or making a trip to A&E.”

Deborah Evans, a pharmacist in Winchester and Fellow of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said:

“Pharmacies have played a central role in helping people to care for themselves during the coronavirus pandemic.

“We have remained open throughout as the front door to the NHS, supporting people in person or over the phone.

“PAGB’s survey results suggest there is real scope to build on changes in the way people have accessed healthcare services in the last three months, making more effective use of the expertise of pharmacists and their teams.

“The health conditions experienced by those who took part in PAGB’s survey can, in many cases, be treated effectively and appropriately with input from a pharmacist and with an over-the-counter product, leaving GP surgeries and A&E departments with more capacity to look after people who have serious or urgent medical problems.”

PAGB Chief Executive, Michelle Riddalls, said:

“Our survey found that half of those who would previously have made a GP appointment as their first option for a self-treatable condition say they are less likely to go down that route in future.

“Additionally, more than seven out of ten people who might previously have gone to A&E for a similar problem said it was less likely to be their preferred option after the coronavirus pandemic.

“If every one of those people chose self care instead of seeing their GP or going to A&E, we estimate that the potential saving to the NHS could reach more than £780 million a year.

“It would also free up healthcare professionals in primary and secondary care to focus their time and expertise on individuals with more serious or long-term health conditions.

“We have a unique opportunity after the coronavirus pandemic to embed these positive changes and make the NHS more sustainable for years to come.

“Our survey results suggest there may never be a better time for policymakers to prioritise and encourage self care.”

- ENDS -

Notes to editors:

PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, represents the manufacturers of branded OTC medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements in the UK.

The survey of 2035 adults was carried out by PureProfile on behalf of PAGB between 22 June and 1 July.

Dr Sarah Jarvis and Deborah Evans are available for interview by arrangement through PAGB.

For further information please contact Polly Newton, Media and Communications Manager, polly.newton@pagb.co.uk or call 07706 001500.