



The Consumer Healthcare Association

11 November 2020

Harness online resources to boost self care, NHS urged

THE NHS should do more to help people self care by offering a clear online gateway to quality-assured information about minor health conditions, say experts.

The call, which comes ahead of Self Care Week beginning on 16 November, follows a co-ordinated Government drive to signpost people towards accurate online guidance about Covid-19 and halt the spread of misinformation about the disease.

The NHS [worked with Google, Twitter and Facebook](#) on a range of measures to ensure that people who search online for 'coronavirus' are directed towards the NHS website and away from 'fake news'.

PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, is urging policymakers to adopt a similar approach towards all self-treatable conditions by developing a self care section in the NHS App and on the NHS website to which people can be referred for trustworthy advice.

The call is backed by leading GP Dr Sarah Jarvis, who said it would help maintain the positive shift towards self care prompted by the coronavirus pandemic.

In a PAGB survey, almost seven out of ten people (69%) who would not previously have considered self care as their first option said they were more likely to do so in the wake of the pandemic.

More than four out of ten respondents (44%) said they were more likely than before to look up symptoms of ill-health online, while almost eight out of ten (77%) believed the NHS should make more information about self care available online.

Almost one in three (32%) said they had not previously used the NHS 111 website to look for information but would do so in future.

Additional analysis in a [digital audit](#) by PAGB found that people looking for health advice online are often directed towards the NHS website – for example, by their GP surgery website.

However, there is currently no designated self care section on the NHS website.

As in the NHS App, a selection of self-treatable ailments such as 'sore throat' are listed alongside a wide range of acute and long-term health conditions and diagnostic tests.

PAGB is recommending that:

- NHS England should develop a self care section in the NHS App and on the NHS website, with information including fact sheets such as those developed by the [Self Care Forum](#)
- NHSX – the body driving digital innovation in the NHS – should explore apps that could support self care, encourage the use of pharmacies and help manage demand on GPs

- Online NHS systems which help people decide what to do about their symptoms should signpost towards local pharmacies for self-treatable conditions where appropriate, rather than connecting them to a GP

Michelle Riddalls, chief executive of PAGB, said: “The coronavirus pandemic has prompted many people to consider self care as a first option when previously they might have opted instinctively – but unnecessarily - for a GP consultation or even a visit to A&E.

“It’s a welcome shift which will help to reduce health inequalities and make the NHS more sustainable by protecting resources for those with serious, long-term and life-threatening health problems.

“But to make sure that people who want to self care can do so safely and effectively, it’s crucial that they have straightforward access to reliable, accurate information.

“They need to know where to look and they need to be able to trust what they read – for example, about which symptoms are ‘normal’ and how to manage them, when they might need specialist medical attention and how to make the best use of expert pharmacy advice.”

Dr Sarah Jarvis said: “One of the few small but important positives of the Covid-19 pandemic has been an increase in the number of people opting to self care for minor ailments.

“To help them do this with confidence, it would be really useful to have separate self care pages on well-trusted resources such as NHS.uk. While there is high quality self care advice within the topics on individual conditions, it would be useful to see a self care section prominently placed on the home page.

“Making self care a topic in itself will encourage people to continue to self care and seek help first from their pharmacist if they have a minor condition, reducing pressure on GP practices and A&E departments.”

Deborah Evans, Fellow of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, said: “Pharmacies can offer expert advice about so many health problems, helping people to self care as well as flagging up symptoms that may need further investigation.

“A self care section on the NHS website would be an effective, easily-accessible platform to highlight the role of community pharmacy teams and encourage more people to use pharmacy services as a first option when they need advice about self-treatable health problems.”

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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.

Self Care Week runs from 16 November – 22 November 2020.

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