

SCF Board Member's Dr Martin McShane Explains the Self Care Continuum to HSJ

On 7th July 2014, the Health Service Journal (HSJ) featured an article by NHS England's Director for Long Term Conditions, Dr Martin McShane. In it, Dr McShane, describes the Self Care Forum's definition of self care, which is visualised by the Self Care Continuum.

The article, which is entitled "Only a whole culture change can make self-care a reality", highlights the need for the NHS to fully adopt the self care concept, which, he says is not a "fixed, single act". Self care, says Dr McShane, who is also a Self Care Forum Board Member, is a continuum of activity that, at one end supports people as they take individual responsibility for their daily lifestyle choices, for example, eating healthily or choosing to exercise.

Moving along the continuum, self care can be applied to the care of minor ailments or long term conditions where people often self-manage without intervention from a health professional.

At the far end of the continuum is major trauma, where responsibility for care is entirely in the hands of healthcare professionals until the start of recovery when self care can begin again.

According to Dr McShane self care support for individuals has not been embraced by the NHS which, he says is due to a range of factors including work pressures. GPs are unable to invest their time and effort in promoting the self care concept to their patients, he says.

A cultural change in practices and among GPs and patients is needed before this will happen. The Self Care Forum believes that if the NHS spends a bit of extra time in supporting patients to self care, whether it is to help them self treat their common ailments, or self manage their long term conditions then the NHS will reap future rewards since individuals will be self care aware resulting in reduced unnecessary consultations making better use of NHS resources.

However, Dr McShane says that "patients will need support if they are to become more self-care aware".

He is keen for pharmacy to have a bigger role in supporting patients and believes pharmacy can help alleviate over-subscribed primary care services – particularly GP services. He also believes pharmacy can be an important triage to emergency services; support patients with medicines optimisation, and provide first response for minor ailments, lifestyle advice and support for self-management.

Dr McShane is not saying that supporting patients to become more self care aware is "easy to do, but it is a must do". Doing nothing – maintaining the status quo – he said, is not an option. NHS finances simply do not allow it. Necessity will be the mother of invention.

If you have a subscription to HSJ – you can read Dr McShane's full article here <http://bit.ly/Xk9Y2d>