

Choose Well Summer Campaign

Q&A

What is the campaign about?

The campaign promotes the message that high street pharmacies are local experts on a range of common complaints. It focuses on a number of different reasons to use pharmacies for advice and treatment for complaints such as coughs and colds, sore throats, upset stomachs and general aches and pains.

The campaign is part of the overall Choose Well campaign, which aims to educate and inform people so that they better understand their local NHS services, where they are located and when to use them.

Why are you advising people to use their pharmacy for these types of complaints?

The number of people going to A&E, dialling 999 and visiting their GP is continuing to rise year on year. A significant proportion of these visits are for common complaints that are self-limiting and will improve by themselves, without the need for medical intervention.

People can save themselves time and effort by either asking their local pharmacy staff for advice, looking for information and advice on-line, or self-treating using some basic medicine cabinet essentials.

How long is the campaign running?

The campaign is being launched to coincide with the start of the school summer holidays. It will run from the 9 July until 31 August. The main message is 'Two massive reasons to use your local pharmacy for summer health advice'.

Winter months are also traditionally busy for the NHS and a Choose Well campaign with a winter theme will be launched for November.

Why should people use their pharmacy instead of going to A&E or dialling 999 if they have a common complaint?

There are a number of reasons why the NHS wants to encourage people to use their pharmacy if they have a common complaint. The first is that A&E, emergency and 999 services are for serious and life-threatening conditions only. Teams working in these areas need to be free to concentrate on people who have life-threatening injuries, or who have had heart-attacks, strokes, or are experiencing breathing difficulties. If people with common complaints use these emergency services it uses valuable time and resources, and increases the amount of time that people have to wait to be seen and treated.

We know that since 2010, first attendances at A&E and emergency departments have gone up by 16.5 per cent.

Why should people use their pharmacy instead of visiting their GP if they have a common complaint?

We have an ageing population in England, with people generally living longer. Medical advances also mean that people with conditions such as multiple sclerosis, lung disease, kidney disease, cancer, heart disease and diabetes are living much longer. Recovery rates for people who have suffered strokes for example are also improving. GPs and their teams also have a role to play in helping to prevent ill-health and promoting good health.

This is really positive news, however it means that people with these conditions need continuing medical care and support. GPs, district nursing teams and others are the first line of support for these groups. At the moment about 51.4 million GP appointments each year are for common complaints alone. If we can encourage and support more people to self-care/self-treat for these common complaints and use their pharmacy for advice, the NHS can ensure that resources are available to help those with long term conditions.

What kind of conditions do you mean by 'common complaints'?

We mean the kind of complaints that the majority of people will experience at some time in their lives and which will usually get better by themselves without any medical intervention. A survey by [detail] revealed that:

- 5.3 million people a year go to see their GP with a blocked nose
- 400,000 with a common cold
- 40,000 with dandruff
- 20,000 with travel sickness

Other common complaints that people visit their GP for, can be treated at home with advice from the pharmacist include:

- skin conditions, such as mild acne and mild eczema
- coughs and colds, including nasal congestion and sore throat
- minor cuts and bruises
- constipation and haemorrhoids (piles)
- hay fever and allergies
- aches and pains, such as headaches, earache and backache
- indigestion, diarrhoea and threadworms
- period pain and thrush
- warts and verrucas, mouth ulcers and cold sores
- athlete's foot
- nappy rash and teething

So when should people use their GP?

Your GP is your local expert if you have concerns about a condition that will not go away, or that is getting worse. It is important if you have a recurring condition that is affecting your ability to function on a day-to-day basis. Your GP will refer you for tests if appropriate and prescribe medication if it is needed.

It is important to remember that antibiotics will have no impact if you have a virus.

Information is available on-line about what to expect if you have a common complaint such those listed above; how long symptoms will last; what you can do to self-care; and the kind of over-the-counter medicines that are available from your local pharmacy to help with the symptoms.

What is the role of the Self Care Forum?

The National Self Care Forum was established in May 2011 and brings together advocates from a number of different areas. It aims to champion and promote the importance and benefits of implementing the practice of self care for patients, public and the NHS . It is responsible for promoting National Self Care Week, which falls in November; it promotes examples of good practice through its annual conference, its on-line forum and its networks of clinicians and patient groups. One of its first initiatives was to work with the Royal College of GPs to launch an on-line training module for GPs and primary care staff on how to effectively support their patients to self-care for common complaints. The Forum is supported by the Health Minister Paul Burstow.

Is this about saving the NHS money?

This is about the NHS being able to provide care when people need it. We have an ageing population in England, with people generally living longer. There are around 15 million people in England living with one or more long term health condition and this number is expected to grow. Medical advances also mean that people with conditions such as multiple sclerosis, lung disease, kidney disease, cancer, heart disease and diabetes are living much longer. Recovery rates for people who have suffered strokes for example are also improving.

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Will GPs refuse to treat patients who attend appointments with common complaints?

Self Care is not about no care. People have a lot to gain if they are supported to effectively self-care for common complaints, in terms of saving them time and effort. If people are more confident about self-caring, they will be able to support their family members. A more confident and better informed population which must be good for all of us.

The Royal College of GPs is promoting an on-line training module for GPs and primary care staff on how to effectively support their patients to self-care. The idea is for GPs to help educate patients who present with common complaints, so that they will know what to do next time.

What has the response been to the campaign to promote self-care so far?

A survey carried out in the North West over winter 2010/11 following a regional campaign had over 500 responses to questions on people's understanding of self-care. Of these 92 per cent said that they would be more likely to use their local pharmacy for help with common complaints as a result of the campaign.

We believe however that more needs to be done to encourage people to self-care for common complaints when they can, to turn good intentions into actions and to educate them about when they do need to use NHS services.

What do you hope the survey will achieve?

The plan is to use the results from the survey to help us further develop our campaign and the approaches we take to educate and inform people about the range of NHS services they have on their doorstep and when to use them; and to encourage and support more people to self-care for common complaints.

How will you know if your campaign is successful?

We understand that instant change in the behaviour of the majority of people is not possible. A sustainable campaign is needed to change people's perceptions about the use of NHS services such as A&E, Emergency Departments, 999 and GP services.

Funding in-depth evaluation is expensive and given the current economic situation the NHS is facing, not something we are able to afford at the moment. For this reason we will draw together a number of different indicators from different sources, so that we will know the impact the campaign is having.

There are some obvious indicators such as attendance at A&E or Emergency Departments, calls to 999 and the number of GP appointments for common complaints. We are working with NHS teams and organisations such as the National Self Care Forum to further monitor public behaviour.

How do services such as NHS 111 fit in?

NHS 111 has been specifically introduced to give advice to people who think they have an urgent health need that isn't an emergency. As NHS 111 is rolled out across the country, it will be promoted as one of the Choose Well options in the range of local NHS services.

This is different from the self-care campaign, which is specifically about what to do if you have an everyday common complaint, such as those listed above.

How much has this campaign cost?

At a time when NHS services are looking to make efficiencies, every effort has been made to ensure that this campaign makes the most of existing opportunities for communication and engagement. To achieve this we have done the following:

- Worked with the marketing team from the pharmaceutical company Pfizer, who helped us to develop the campaign and funded the development of the original brand design concept
- Used internal NHS designers to create the materials that are part of the campaign
- Where possible co-ordinated the printing of materials to save on costs, through economies of scale and made all materials available in electronic format, on-line
- Worked with corporate pharmacy partners to develop the campaign, so that it is promoted in pharmacy stores across the country
- Developed a database of just under 800 corporate partners, who are promoting the campaign messages to their staff through their own internal communication channels
- Formed a partnership between the National Association for Patient Participation, the National Self Care Forum, the National Pharmacy Association and the NHS so that the campaign messages reach the maximum possible number of stakeholders
- Created social media and media toolkits for colleagues to use
- Local engagement teams will incorporate the Choose Well campaign messages into their activities with local groups over the coming weeks

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Version 1