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Self Care Forum
Response to NHS Constitution consultation

Background

The purpose of the Self Care Forum is to promote self care and embed it into everyday life. The SCF was formed in May 2011 and inaugurated by the then Minister for Care Services, Paul Burstow, MP. We believe that with the right kind of information and support people can live healthy lives and self care prepares people to treat and manage commonly occurring and long term conditions.

Self care requires competent and informed people who understand what they need to do to remain healthy and what to do if they become ill or develop a long term condition. So being able to self-care directly benefits individuals, their families and society. Advantages of better self-care include:

- Saving people time and money
- Giving individuals a feeling of control
- Reducing anxiety Improving quality of life
- Improving disease outcomes

The NHS needs to be accessed effectively and efficiently so that it can provide quality care to all in the future. The Self Care Forum aims to promote self care by bringing together healthcare professionals and patient groups who are committed to encouraging and empowering people to self care and take care of their own and their families' health.

The Response

We are particularly interested in the notion that to sustain the NHS under its current funding structures everyone needs to and should be responsible for promoting good health, be they individuals, the NHS or national and local governments. Of particular interest to us therefore are the provisions for encouraging greater individual responsibility. We are pleased to note that section 2b page 9 of the revised version now makes it clearer that people can categorically take responsibility for their own and their family's good health and wellbeing. This goes a long way to ensuring that patients, the public and NHS organisations are able to support the ethos of self care as part of everyday living.



We also welcome the intention to better reflect patient and carer involvement and shared decision-making in the NHS Constitution. The Self Care Forum strongly believes in the importance of shared decision-making as the way forward in engendering patient-centred approaches throughout the system, from the first contact to the last. There is a great deal to be said for making sure that consultations, wherever they take place, reflect the principles of shared decision-making but this can only be meaningful and effective if people have an understanding of self care and a level of health literacy with which they can enter into the dialogue. We particularly welcome the recognition that information alone is not enough and that the NHS has an obligation to support people in understanding the information so that they are able to act upon it (p8). The Self Care Forum advocates the need for health literacy to be built into all interactions with patients and the public with the necessary education and training put in place to help in this process.

Consequently, we urge consideration of the issues of support for self care, health literacy, and health education in schools, and for cross-Government links between the Department of Health and the Department for Education, as well as reference to the responsibility of Local Authorities to have regard to the NHS Constitution. Our reason for requesting this is that we believe changes to the NHS Constitution could be linked to the responsibilities in primary and secondary legislation given to the NHS Commissioning Board, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Health and Wellbeing Boards.

The only significant addition the Self Care Forum wishes to make is an addition to the NHS Constitution Handbook that explains the meaning of responsibility for health and self care. There is sometimes a misunderstanding about what we mean by 'self care' which should be addressed since there is a significant and growing acceptance of its importance for individuals and organisations alike. The principle of shared decision-making encompasses the concept and ethos of a population, in and out of the NHS, to embrace the ability of people to own and be responsible for their good health and wellbeing. The Self Care Forum believes we should be explicit in stating this. We propose the following to this end:

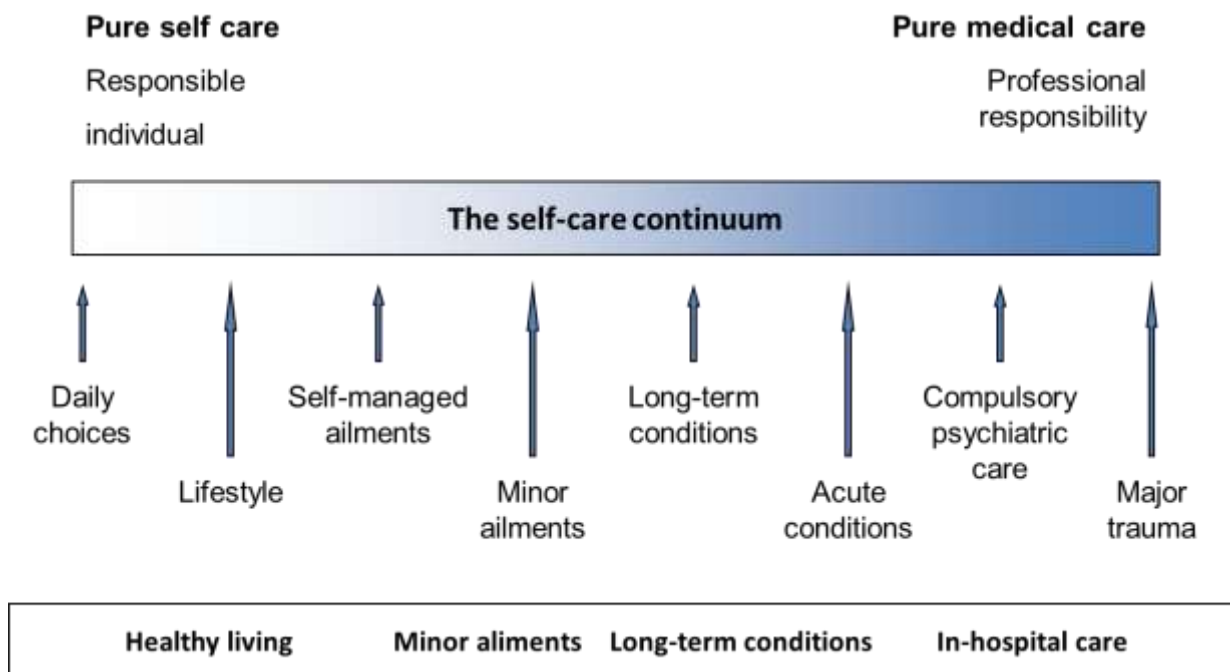
2 Self care

Self care is that essential part of the continuum of healthcare in which patients and the public deal appropriately, effectively and safely with their own immediate and longer term medical and health needs.

To do this, fundamentally, they require good health literacy - including a proper understanding of their own bodies and the skills for keeping them healthy; a working knowledge of how and where to access reliable health information; ability to evaluate the appropriateness and quality of this information; knowledge of when and where to seek further help; and being amenable to and competent in adopting the most suitable treatment for them or those for whom they are caring.

The aim of the illustration below is to demonstrate how any particular example of care lies on a spectrum ranging from 100% self care to 100% professional care – the self-care continuum. 100% self care represents daily choices (such as brushing teeth regularly), while 100% professional care represents major trauma (such as neurosurgery). In between these two ends of the spectrum is shared care – healthcare professionals supporting individuals to care for themselves.

The Self care Continuum



We very much hope you will note our comments and accept our additions. We would welcome further discussions with you to elaborate on any of the points made.

Ms Gopa Mitra, MBE
On behalf of the Self Care Forum Board

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