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51 million unnecessary GP visits....NHS investigate why

- **5.2 million visits annually for blocked noses**
- **40,000 visits for dandruff**
- **Reducing unnecessary visits to GP and A&E could free resources**

A new NHS survey is set to investigate the reasons why people head to the doctor instead of looking after themselves at home.

More than 51 million* people per year visit their GP with minor problems which would clear up by themselves – or with a little help from an over-the-counter remedy.

Up to 40,000 GP visits per year are for dandruff, while a further 20,000 go to their local surgery for travel-sickness, and a staggering 5.2 million with blocked noses.

Health chiefs fear these unnecessary GP visits – almost one in five appointments are for very minor problems – are draining resources from caring for older, chronically-ill people, and having a knock-on effect of placing A&E and emergency departments under further pressure.

All kinds of minor illnesses and injuries, from colds to period pains, skin conditions to minor cuts, can be treated at home with advice and medicines from your local pharmacist.

The NHS is surveying patients to find out why they choose the GP surgery or A&E over their pharmacist, ahead of work to encourage more “self-care”.

Dr Paul Stillman, a GP in Crawley and a member of the National Self Care Forum, said: “We have a growing older population in England. More people are living longer with complex or long-term health conditions – this is great news for everyone, but it does mean we need to take steps so that we can focus more resources on these potentially vulnerable groups of people.

“We are not saying that people should not go to see their GP or use their A&E, emergency and 999 services if they believe they are seriously ill. We need to understand how we can encourage them to help themselves for common problems.”

“51.4 million GP appointments a year in England and Wales are for minor ailments alone, if we can encourage more people to self-care for common complaints, we can re-focus resources on people who really need them.

Stephanie Varah, Chief Executive of the National Association for Patient Participation, is the patient champion for the national Self Care Forum: “Empowering individuals to access and understand appropriate information that supports shared and informed decision making about treatment, self care and lifestyle choices is key to helping people understand how they can better look after themselves.”

Local NHS teams will be encouraging people in their local communities to complete the survey either online or in hard copy. Responses will help teams shape how they work with their communities to encourage them to self-care as part of the NHS’s Choose Well campaign. The campaign aims to reduce inappropriate attendance at A&E by helping people choose an alternative service – such as a GP or a minor injuries unit – as well as encouraging self care.

The survey can be found at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/N8WQVTV>.

Notes to Editors:

* Source: IMS Health Dec. 2007 study, commissioned by PAGB

1. Please find attached photos of Dr Paul Stillman and Stephanie Varah
2. Dr Paul Stillman works in a large busy general practice in Crawley, Sussex. He is trainer and director of one of the UK's largest vocational training schemes, the British Postgraduate Medical Federation. He also writes extensively, and makes appearances on both radio and television. Dr Stillman is an advocate for the National Self Care Forum
3. Stephanie Varah is Chief Executive of the National Association for Patient Participation (N.A.P.P) a unique UK wide umbrella organisation for patient-led groups within general practices. N.A.P.P is an independent registered charity with over 30 years’ experience and expertise in promoting, supporting and developing Patient Participation Groups (PPGs).

4. The National Self Care Forum was established in May 2011. Its aim is to further the reach of self-care for common complaints and embed it into everyday life.
5. The National Association for Patient Participation was established by a group of GPs in 1978 to support and promote patient participation in primary care. Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), groups of active patients working in partnership with GPs and practice teams
6. Illnesses and ailments which 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
7. The survey will close on 30 July. The results from the survey will be published in the autumn 2012. For more information on the survey please contact: Cathy Stuart on 0161 625 7274.