

Self care

November 2012 ushers in the fourth NHS 'Self Care Week' – and a focus point will be the information and services available to patients through pharmacy

The first national Department of Health 'Self Care Week' took place in 2009, but in 2011 Minister for Care Services, Paul Burstow, officially launched a 'Self Care Forum' (www.selfcareforum.org) to drive greater awareness of what this concept really means, and the impact that an improvement in self care could have on secondary care services and the wider NHS. A 'virtual' meeting place for all stakeholders in patient self care, this website hosts a wide range of resources, such as patient leaflets and case studies of local commissioning arrangements, and a key emphasis is the part community pharmacy plays as a first port of call for information and advice.

For example, one of twelve 'top tips' the Forum offers GP practices, is: "Involve the local pharmacists and community nurses in giving the same advice and support for self care; and work with local pharmacists to ensure that their triage of common problems is similar to that in the practice."

"Safe, high-quality care depends on good relationships and communication with these other professionals, so building good links should be a medium-term priority," it continues. "When good relationships exist, they can be consulted and involved in agreeing the advice to give in the management of common self-limiting illnesses."

Common agenda

The Self Care Forum itself helps with this relationship-building – bringing together

many healthcare professionals from a range of backgrounds as 'Self Care champions'.

In 2012, however, Self Care Week was also preceded by the Forum's 'NHS Choose Well' summer campaign in July and August, explicitly championing the role of pharmacy.

"Your high street pharmacy can give you expert advice without an appointment", was one of this campaign's two core messages, with resources including electronic fliers, a Facebook social media campaign and even a colouring competition for local school children.

It was further supported by a new online survey designed to help reduce inappropriate use of A&E and emergency services – and also GP appointments – by highlighting the self-care opportunities available with pharmacy support. The survey points out that more than 51 million GP visits are for so-called 'minor' ailments such as coughs and colds (over five million just for blocked noses!), and asks patients just why they choose to take this path to encourage them to change.

This will be followed by a further Choose Well campaign with a winter theme in November 2012 – and itself follows work the NPA has already done with NHS London in terms of promoting self care through pharmacies during the London 2012 Olympic Games.

Stephanie Varah, Chief Executive of the National Association for Patient Participation (the patient 'champion'

on the Self Care Forum), explains: "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."

Care continuum

This also chimes with the views of NPA Chief Executive Mike Holden, who is another of the Self Care Forum's champions – and who points to a "self care continuum", running from initial lifestyle choices to help living with complicated conditions (see box, right).

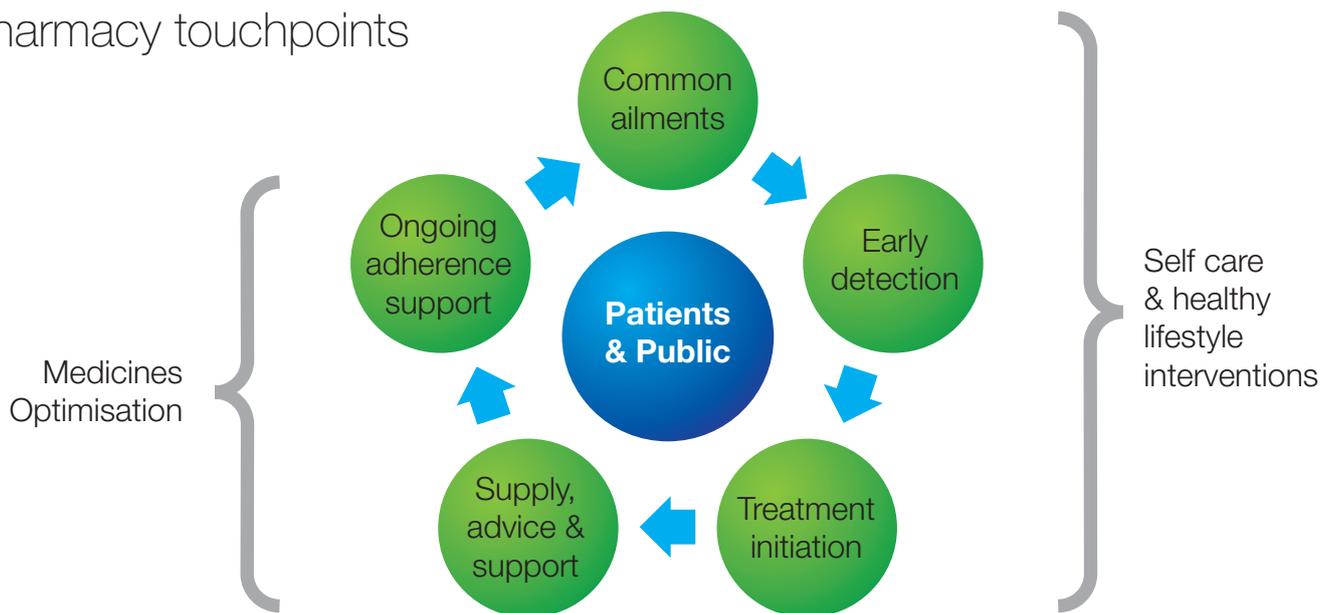
Mike points out that the term "minor ailments" is itself quite misleading, and that self-treatable common ailments is just one of a number of 'touch points' between the pharmacist and the aims of self care (see diagram, right).

"The patient is at the centre of everything, and they would be unlikely to describe their problem – constipation or diarrhoea, for example – as 'minor'," Mike explains.

"Some people feel self care is all about those ailments that are easily treatable with OTC products, but the prevention advice is often just as important as the treatment itself."

For example, this could mean healthy living advice focused on factors such as diet, as well as highlighting 'triggers' for common conditions such as hay fever or Atopic Eczema.

Pharmacy touchpoints



“Moving on from that pharmacy is also a place for both the prevention and identification of long-term conditions,” Mike continues. “For example, pharmacists can play a role in the early detection of skin, mouth and bowel cancer through the questions they ask, as well as the identification of diabetes or cardiovascular risk, whether that is hereditary or lifestyle related.”

“Early detection then leads to treatment or referral, after which pharmacies across the UK provide important adherence support through structured services such as the New Medicine Service (NMS), the Discharge Medicines Review (DMR) and the Chronic Medication Services (CMS).”

Optimising approach

Mike explains that such “medicine optimisation” is another major aspect of the self-care agenda.

“Some of this is about addressing the balance between a patient’s concerns, and often misbeliefs, about their medicines and their understanding of how necessary they are – in spite of the fact their effects can often be ‘silent’,” he says.

“We need a big push in terms of ensuring patients can get the most out of their medicines, and fitting that into the long-term condition care pathways.”

In November the NPA will be supporting this objective not only through its Ask Your Pharmacist (AYP) week campaign and Self Care Week, but also by supporting a medicines optimisation conference, he says.

“All the self care touch points demonstrate what pharmacy can help to achieve in terms of efficiencies and joined-up working,” he adds.

“We’ll be doing some media work surrounding these messages, and we’ve also been working closely with the Pharmaceutical Association of Great Britain (PAGB) on the self-treatable conditions aspect.”

He also highlights the useful fact that Self Care Week falls just one week after AYP Week (see p. 10). In 2012 AYP Week will focus particularly on promoting pharmacy services to men (who typically underuse them) and making the environment more male-friendly. “Men also aren’t too great at self care,” Mike points out.

Furthermore, improving self care is one of the clear aims of the Healthy Living Pharmacy (HLP) model – which is now an official workstream of the Pharmacy and Public Health Forum (of which Mike is a member).

However, while the NPA will invest significant time and resources in promoting self care throughout November, he explains that it is first and foremost a collaborative effort.

“The Self Care Forum is about encouraging this as an ethos, with everyone feeding in their different thoughts and views,” he says.

“We should all be continually supporting self care through the most appropriate forms of communication and education.”

The Self Care Continuum – pure self care to pure medical care

- Daily choices
- Lifestyle
- Self-managed ailments
- Common ailments
- Long-term conditions
- Acute conditions
- Compulsory psychiatric care
- Major trauma

Self Care Week materials include the logo, a banner, web button, web link, leaflets, posters and case studies that support the campaign’s key messages.

In 2011 the NPA distributed Self Care Week posters to 4,500 independent pharmacies, The New Statesman magazine held a roundtable Westminster event called ‘Community Pharmacy in 21st Century Britain’ and Diabetes UK detailed 15 minimum standards of care for people living with the condition, including self care support. NHS North West linked it with their Winter campaign, signposting patients to the most appropriate services, including pharmacies and walk-in centres.

There were almost 1,000 visits to the brand new Self Care Forum website, and 2,500 copies of the leaflet ‘Guide to Pharmacy Services – It’s Your Choice’ were ordered from the DH Distribution Centre. 95 per cent of stakeholder organisations said they would support Self Care Week 2012.