

## **Beth McCarron Nash Explains the Merits of Self Care to Fellow GPs**

In a bid to convince her peers of the value in promoting self care to patients, Self Care Forum Board member, Dr Beth McCarron-Nash wrote three blogs for GP Magazine.

By addressing exactly how self care benefits patients, doctors and the NHS, Dr McCarron-Nash, who is also a GPC negotiator and a GP, makes it clear that it is imperative surgeries introduce self care. She insists the “rise in patient demand means that general practice is so over stretched that GPs have no alternative but to include self care as a tool to reduce demand.”

### How Self Care Benefits the Surgery

Self care can help with patient demand and this is raised in Dr McCarron-Nash’s [introductory](#) blog of 28 March 2014. Using BMA and RCGP figures to emphasise her point about mounting demand, the blog highlights the rise in GP consultation rates which have doubled since 2004. GPs in England are now handling around 340,000 consultations a year and this upward trend is expected to continue.

GPs are demoralised as they struggle with increasingly complex care, rising demand and declining funds. By educating patients on how to look after their own health safely, self care can help reduce demand on primary care services.

### How Self Care Benefits the NHS

NHS funding is another strong reason to implement more self care. The NHS is hurtling towards a projected £30bn funding gap by 2020 which means NHS England is keen to recommend ways of how this might be avoided. Self care is highlighted as a solution in their latest health policy document, which Dr McCarron-Nash highlights in her first blog, “Sustainable, Resilient, Healthy People and Places: A sustainable Development Strategy for the NHS”. The document states self care is likely to produce “economically sustainable solutions.”

It also reinforces the 2012 government policy “make every contact count” and says “every contact and every decision taken across the health and care system can help build the immediate and longer term benefits of helping people to be well and reduce their care needs.”

### How Self Care Benefits the Patient

Whether it’s for common ailments or long term conditions, the Self Care Forum has heard time and again that patients would prefer to look after their own health rather than visiting the surgery or the hospital but need support to be able to do this. In her [second](#) blog, which appeared in GP Magazine on 11 April, Dr McCarron-Nash raises this point. Patients that know about their health achieve better health outcomes. Involving patients in their health decision-making helps them to be healthy and in control.

### Self Care Forum Material

Throughout the three blogs, Self Care Forum material is presented as the practical resource surgeries can use to introduce self care in their practice. The thirteen fact sheets are a particular focus since they provide support for people suffering from common ailments with helpful

information such as the normal duration of symptoms and red flags to help patients understand what they can do for themselves next time.

This is explained in her [third](#), and final blog, published on 1<sup>st</sup> August 2014, Dr McCarron-Nash makes the point that patients need educating on what is normal for particular common ailments, such as the range and duration of symptoms and when they need to seek intervention. She explains that whilst most patients understand antibiotics don't work on cold and flu, they still make an appointment. This is because they have tried self care but think it hasn't worked. They often underestimate the length of time some symptoms can last, for example, it is normal for a cough to last three or four weeks, and a sore throat can take up to 2 weeks to get better. But most patients don't realise this and seek reassurance that there is nothing seriously wrong.

### Patient Participation Groups

Utilising the skills of the wider practice staff to deliver self care services is highlighted by Dr McCarron-Nash as is the strength behind Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) who, she says are uniquely placed to have an essential role in empowering patients. She adds that they can encourage patients to support their own health and take the self care campaign out to the local community.

PPGs are ideal as they understand the workload pressures on their surgeries and can help GPs manage patient demand.

### Investing to save

In this, her final blog in the series, Beth attempts to motivate general practices into introducing self care in the surgery. She admits that not all GPs are enthusiasts for self care, but, she points out that general practice has never been so busy and GPs so demoralised. Some GPs may think they don't have the time for self care but, she insists, "we should make time for this, it's all about investing to save."

The three articles, Self care: part one - Why GPs must invest in self care on 28 March 2014; Self care: part two - Harnessing patient power in self care on 11 April 2014; and, Invest to save: encouraging self-care awareness in GPs on 1 August 2014 were published in GP magazine; copyright Haymarket Medical Media.