



DATE: 20<sup>th</sup> November 2019

## MEDIA RELEASE

### *Self care: not just for the heart and mind*

**This Self Care Week, PAGB examines the definition of “self care” and how its meaning has evolved over the last 50 years**

- New research uncovers lack of clear understanding of the term “self care”
- Each year there are 18 million GP appointments for self-treatable conditions, which do not need a doctor’s consultation<sup>1</sup>, with a cost to the NHS of £810 million<sup>2</sup>
- This Self Care Week, PAGB is calling on people to reassess their attitudes to self care to help relieve the pressure on the NHS this winter

Self Care Week (18<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> November) is an annual awareness week that focuses on embedding support for self care across communities, families and generations.<sup>3</sup> But as we call on people to self care better this winter, can we be sure that people understand what we are asking of them?

New research by the consumer healthcare association, PAGB, found that only 50% of people understand self care to mean taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. Recent statistics released by the NHS revealed that every year, there are an estimated 3.7 million visits to A&E for self-treatable conditions costing the NHS £2.3 billion<sup>5</sup>. The research from PAGB also supported this with its findings that people would consider going to A&E for indigestion (2.6%) or constipation (3.2%). Furthermore, 11% said they would go to a GP for heartburn or a sore throat.<sup>6</sup>

The term “self care” was first used almost 50 years ago in 1972, when PAGB, which celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, sponsored the first NHS Panel on Self Care, introducing the term into our national vocabulary. Back then, self care was defined as “*the actions people take for themselves and their families to promote and maintain good health and wellbeing and to take care of their self-treatable conditions*”<sup>7</sup>. However, since then, the term has begun to take on new meaning and, people’s interpretation of self care has shifted.

Today self care is also seen as a way to relax, indulge and unwind, and evaporate the stresses of modern life. According to Google, searches for self care have tripled in the last five years<sup>8</sup> but PAGB research shows that the term can mean different things to different people, from eating a vegan diet, to losing weight and getting a good night’s sleep<sup>9</sup>. So, what should the term “self care” encompass and why is it so important?

GP, Dr Sarah Jarvis says: “Self care begins by making very simple, but very necessary health choices, the choices some of us take for granted – such as knowing what to do when you’re unwell or what NHS service to use when you need help”.

According to Dr Jarvis, the alarming NHS statistics around GP and A&E visits for self-treatable conditions demonstrate just how important self care is: “From self-treating a common cold with



widely available over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, or by visiting a pharmacist to discuss a health complaint, these simple steps will free up money that is sorely needed by the NHS, especially when taking into consideration the UK's ageing and growing population.”

Whilst community pharmacies have a big role to play in supporting people to self care, research by PAGB found trust in pharmacists to be relatively low, with only 35% of people saying that they totally trust pharmacists, a statistic that is at odds with the amount of training and expertise pharmacists have.

PAGB Chief Executive, John Smith says: “Pharmacists are ideally placed to give people advice and support them to self care for self-treatable conditions, ensuring they get fast access to effective treatments, without the need to wait for a GP appointment or visit A&E. Not only is this better for the individual, but it saves NHS resources and GP's time for the people who really need it.

“Effective self care is a lifelong habit and whatever it means to you, it is important we all incorporate the basic elements of self care into our daily lives, by making healthy choices and making sure we know when and where to access the right advice and support when we are unwell. As an organisation, we will always encourage people to visit their local pharmacy and hope lots more people will make the pharmacist their first port of call for advice this winter.”

Dr Jarvis, concludes: “As a GP, I'm regularly reminded that looking after the inner self is just as important as looking after the outer self, so it is encouraging to see awareness of the concept of self care visibly on the rise. However, as the term evolves to encompass all things “feel-good,” it is important to make sure the fundamentals of self care for self-treatable conditions are not overlooked.”

- ENDS -

#### Notes to editors:

PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, represents the manufacturers of branded OTC medicines, self care medical devices and food supplements in the UK.

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<sup>1</sup> Practice Business (2019), [NHS Campaign aims to drive patients to pharmacists](#)

<sup>2</sup> NHS England (2017), [Stay Well Pharmacy Campaign](#)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.selfcareforum.org/events/self-care-week-resources/>

<sup>4</sup> PAGB Consumer Research, 3GEM, 2019

<sup>5</sup> PAGB Self Care Nation Report November, 2016

<sup>6</sup> PAGB Consumer Research, 3GEM, 2019

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pagb.co.uk/self-care/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=today%205-y&geo=GB&q=self%20care>

<sup>9</sup> PAGB Consumer Research, 3GEM, 2019