



The Consumer Healthcare Association

06 October 2020

Teach self care to improve health and help the NHS, says report

SCHOOL pupils should learn about self care for minor ailments as part of a 'wholesale cultural shift' in attitudes towards health services, says a coalition of healthcare and industry bodies.

The Royal College of Nursing, NHS Clinical Commissioners and PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, are among those calling for the inclusion of self care in the national curriculum as well as in training and education courses for healthcare professionals.

They are urging the Government to develop a national self care strategy to help address health inequalities, improve outcomes and reduce demands on the NHS.

The recommendations come in a joint statement on self care, also signed by the National Pharmacy Association, the Self Care Forum, the Company Chemists Association, the Pharmaceutical Services Negotiating Committee (PSNC) and the Association of Independent Multiple Pharmacies.

The statement says self care allows people to 'take ownership' of their health by recognising the symptoms of self-treatable conditions and understanding how to manage them.

"[By] equipping people with the knowledge to take greater care of themselves and freeing up healthcare professionals' time, self care can play a significant role in driving improvements in population health," it says.

"To truly deliver the benefits that self care can bring, a wholesale cultural shift is needed. Both the public's perception of health and wellbeing, and healthcare professionals' perceptions of the role they can play, need to change."

The joint clinical consensus statement on self care calls for measures to enhance the role of community pharmacists, encouraging people to make better use of their expertise and accessibility.

In particular, it recommends that community pharmacists should be able to refer individuals directly to other healthcare professionals. Anyone consulting a community pharmacist would therefore be guaranteed expert advice, an effective over-the-counter product or an appointment for medical help elsewhere.

The joint statement also calls on NHS England and Improvement to explore the implementation of 'recommendation prescriptions', encouraging clinicians to discuss and refer patients towards self care.

Additionally, it recommends that:

- Community pharmacists should have access to patients' health records, enabling them to read and write about medications taken previously or recommended to an individual;

- NHSX [the body driving digital innovation in the NHS] should explore technologies that can be used to promote self care and manage demand on the NHS;
- Primary Care Networks (locally-connected groups of healthcare providers such as GPs and mental health services) should consider ways to improve self care in their communities.

Earlier this year, a survey by PAGB suggested the coronavirus pandemic had changed attitudes towards self care as people opted to stay away from GP surgeries and A&E departments.

Almost seven out of ten respondents (69%) who might not have considered self care as their first option before the pandemic said they were more likely to likely to do so in future.

Among those who previously considered A&E as an acceptable route to access care for generally self-treatable conditions, more than seven out of ten (71%) said it was less likely to be their first option after the coronavirus pandemic.

Among those who previously sought a GP appointment as their first option, more than half (51%) said they were less likely to do so after the pandemic.

Michelle Riddalls, Chief Executive of PAGB, said: “Self care is a vital part of our health system. It has the potential to reduce health inequalities, improve outcomes and protect NHS resources for those who need them most.

“However, too often it goes unrecognised by policymakers.

“We have a unique opportunity now to embed and expand self care practices that many people have adopted safely and effectively during the coronavirus pandemic.

“This clinical consensus statement demonstrates support across a broad range of healthcare and pharmacy organisations for a national self care strategy and the positive impact it would have on individuals as well as on the NHS as a whole.”

Dr Graham Jackson, Chair NHS Clinical Commissioners said: “The development of a national self-care strategy is an important component of population health; empowering people to self-care where appropriate can lead to improved personal wellbeing. At the same time it reduces the burden on stretched health services, which in turn improves access to healthcare professionals for those that need the professional support.”

Mark Lyonette, Chief Executive of the National Pharmacy Association, said: “The coronavirus pandemic has challenged people to think differently about their healthcare choices, so this is a good moment to encourage the whole system to embrace self care. The NPA is pleased to be associated with calls to embed self care culturally and to promote it in health care practice.”

Helen Donovan, Chair of the Self Care Forum, said: “Self care not only helps to manage demand on the healthcare system and healthcare professionals, but it empowers people to improve their health and wellbeing.

“The Government should be exploring ways to facilitate a system-wide shift towards a culture of holistic self care. To achieve this, the Self Care Forum is supporting calls for a

national strategy for self care.”

Malcolm Harrison, Chief Executive of the Company Chemists Association, said: “Today, more than ever before, we are seeing the importance of self care, in which community pharmacy plays a vital role, ensuring that people have the right information and support to manage their healthcare needs.

“We support the PAGB’s call for self care to become an integrated part of our healthcare system.”

– 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.

For further information please contact Polly Newton, Media and Communications Manager, polly.newton@pagb.co.uk or call 07706 001500.