



The Consumer Healthcare Association

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New survey shows pharmacy use up, with support for wider role

More people are visiting pharmacies for health advice in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, a new survey has found.

In a poll by PAGB, the consumer healthcare association, 47% of respondents said they turned to their local pharmacist for 'initial advice or medication' for a self-treatable condition – up from 37% in 2020.

The survey also found that more than half of respondents (55%) believe pharmacists should be able to update people's medical records while one in two (50%) agreed they should have the right to view medical records.

The UK-wide survey of more than 2,000 people asked respondents about their attitudes to self care and accessing health services in the 12 months to June 2021, when coronavirus-related lockdown measures were in force to varying degrees.

The survey results, published by PAGB ahead of International Self Care Day on 24 July, show that:

- Almost seven out of ten people (69%) support the idea of GP surgeries referring patients to a pharmacist if appropriate for a self-treatable condition, rather than arranging a GP consultation (the Community Pharmacy Consultation Service)
- Almost a third of those (31%) who would not have consulted a pharmacist as their first option before the COVID-19 pandemic said they would be more likely to do so in future – a figure that remains unchanged from PAGB's survey in 2020
- More than one in four (27%) said the pandemic had changed their attitude towards self care – up from 24% in 2020.

Comments included: "It's made me realise it's not always essential to go to a GP or A&E" and "I look up online or ask a pharmacist".

Asked what would make them more likely to use their local pharmacist for advice, 44% said 'more privacy' in the pharmacy.

This was followed by:

- Telephone access to the pharmacy team (32%)
- Pharmacists having the right to refer individuals directly to another healthcare professional, such as a GP or physiotherapist, if judged necessary (31%)
- Pharmacists having the authority to view and update medical records (25%)

PAGB supports the introduction of appropriate access to patients' records and the right to refer to other healthcare professionals.

Michelle Riddalls, CEO of PAGB, said: “Our findings underline the contribution and expertise of pharmacists in supporting self care and in helping to ease pressure on NHS resources such as GP appointments.

“We want to ensure that the shift towards appropriate self care witnessed during the pandemic is maintained, and there is no doubt that pharmacists have a key role to play in achieving that goal.

“We hope the level of support in our survey for broadening pharmacy access to medical records and for pharmacists’ right to refer to other healthcare professionals will help drive these issues up the agenda, particularly at a time when the Government is looking to integrate different parts of the health system more fully through its new Health and Care Bill and its recently-published Data Strategy.”

GP Dr Sarah Jarvis said: “Pharmacists are an invaluable and integral part of our healthcare system. Their training and expertise mean they are ideally placed to advise people about self care and self-treatment options.

“They are also in a perfect position to recognise when further medical advice might be necessary from a GP or other healthcare professional.

“Allowing pharmacists the right to update medical records and to refer people to fellow healthcare professionals would be a hugely positive step towards integrating different parts of the primary healthcare system.

“It would also send a clear signal that pharmacists have the necessary skills, qualifications and authority to play a key role in individuals’ healthcare – as a GP, it makes perfect sense that they should be in the same position as GPs, practice nurses, practice-based pharmacists and others who are empowered to see and update patients’ medical records.”

Pharmacist [Deborah Evans](#) said: “These findings show the value of pharmacists and pharmacy teams who have been open throughout the pandemic.

“We can do even more to support self care but this has to be part of a better-integrated health system which fully recognises our expertise and training.

“It is particularly encouraging that almost seven out of ten people in PAGB’s survey favour the arrangements that allow GP surgeries to refer patients to community pharmacies under the NHS Community Pharmacy Consultation Service. This service encourages and supports appropriate self care for the benefit of individuals and the NHS as a whole.”

Most common self-treatable conditions

Headache and backache remain the most commonly-experienced health conditions reported by respondents (*see table 1, below*) but colds and coughs have moved into the top five, replacing allergies and heartburn/indigestion.

Colds top the list of conditions that people are comfortable treating by themselves, with 94% saying they are confident practising self care for cold symptoms, followed by coughs (83%) and headaches (79%)

Table 1
Top ten self-treatable conditions experienced by PAGB survey respondents

2021		2020	
Headache	55%	Headache	43%
Backache	48%	Backache	33%
Colds	42%	Allergies	32%
Cuts or bruises	41%	Cuts or bruises	24%
Coughs	32%	Heartburn/indigestion	20%
Allergies (eg hay fever)	30%	Diarrhoea	17%
Heartburn/indigestion	30%	Coughs	16%
Sore throat	29%	Constipation	16%
Constipation	25%	Period pain	16%
Diarrhoea	25%	Sore throat	15%

Table 2
Which conditions do you feel confident treating by yourself?

Most confident	
Colds	94%
Coughs	83%
Headache	79%
Cuts or bruises	78%
Sore throat	77%
Diarrhoea	69%
Constipation	68%
A minor burn	68%
Allergies (eg hay fever)	65%
Insect bites or stings	64%

- 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.

The PAGB survey of 2,078 people around the UK was carried out by [Pureprofile](#) between 27 May and 3 June, 2021.

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