

Medicines for Self-Care

Introduction

NHS Nottingham North and East, NHS Nottingham West and NHS Rushcliffe CCGs support individuals purchasing medications and products from local pharmacies for the treatment of minor ailments as part of self-care. Many of the medicines and treatments are more expensive when they are purchased on an NHS prescription as opposed to directly from pharmacies and supermarkets. Also, local pharmacies are able to support individuals with advice for the treatment of minor ailments. As a result, prescribers are recommended not to write a prescription for over the counter medicines (OTC), treatments and products, except in the case of chronic conditions.

Self-care is extremely important to a person's health and wellbeing as it makes sure individuals have control over their health, improving quality of life and improving disease outcomes. Medicine for self-care is a central part of this approach, and many GP practices already encourage patients to take a personalised approach to keeping themselves healthy, including getting advice from the local Community Pharmacy.

Currently around 20% of GP time and 40% of their total consultations are used for these common minor conditions that could be treated without seeing a GP. Individuals that care for themselves have better health and reduced demand for services. This in turn allows more time for health professionals to see patients that require treatment for more complex conditions.

Research suggests that health-seeking behaviour is repetitive with the majority of patients choosing to visit a GP if a prescription was issued on the last occasion. This can have an impact on GPs' time and it has been found that GPs who experienced a lack of time in their medical practice had higher rates of writing prescriptions than those GPs who did not feel a lack of time (1).

Community Pharmacies offer a readily accessible alternative healthcare pathway for patients. They are able to give free advice on many minor illnesses, and stock a wide range of inexpensive treatments. There is no need for an appointment and many pharmacies are open long hours over seven days a week.

The NHS belongs to everybody and the CCGs must ensure that its resources are used in the best possible way for all patients.

Position Statement

As part of its self-care strategy, NHS Nottingham North and East, NHS Nottingham West and NHS Rushcliffe recommend people to visit their local pharmacy to purchase medicines and treatments for minor, short term conditions.

It is advised that all prescribers, including GPs and non-medical prescribers, direct individuals to purchase recommended, readily available, over the counter medicines, treatments and products.

Treatments for Minor Ailments

1. **Appendix One** lists the common minor illnesses that are considered suitable for self-care. This is included as a guide and is not promoted as an exhaustive list.
2. Many minor ailments are not serious in nature and often can be managed by the individual. Prescribed products aimed at treating the symptoms of many of these ailments may not offer value for money. It is expected that patients should routinely be provided with information regarding where they can purchase these products. These products should not be routinely prescribed on NHS prescription.
3. An increasing range of medicines is available for purchase and it is expected that patients will purchase such medicines after seeking appropriate advice from a community pharmacist or other healthcare professional. This is particularly the case in self-limiting illness. The range of medicines available increases regularly.
4. Clinical judgement should be used when considering whether it is acceptable to ask a patient to purchase their medication e.g. paracetamol taken on a 'when required' basis can be purchased in small quantities, however regular full dose paracetamol for chronic pain may be less suitable for purchase due to the restrictions in place relating to quantities of medication involved.
5. Prescribers will be required to consider whether the benefit of prescribing a treatment for an individual justifies the expense to the NHS. Such judgments should be based purely on clinical factors and should not be influenced by socio-economic aspects such as the patient's ability to purchase. To consider social and other non-clinical factors automatically introduces inequality and runs contrary to the tenet of the NHS in that people with equal need should be treated equally.
6. It is important to check that the OTC medicine is licensed for the desired indication. Requests for the purchase of OTC medicines for unlicensed indications will be refused by community pharmacies.
7. Community pharmacists should not advise patients to request their GP to prescribe medicines available for self-limiting conditions and minor health problems where these are available to purchase.
8. Patients and the public have available an increasing range of resources for advice on medicines use e.g. community pharmacists and Pharmacy First
<http://psnc.org.uk/nottinghamshire-lpc/nhs-england/northmidlands/pharmacy-services/pharmacy-first-scheme/>
NHS 111, and NHS Choices to name a few.
NHS Nottingham North and East, NHS Nottingham West and NHS Rushcliffe encourages patients and the public to access advice and purchase such homely remedies as they and their family may need e.g. Calpol

References

1. Grol R, Mokkink H, Smits A, et al. Workload and job satisfaction of general practitioners and the quality of patient care. *Fam Pract.* 1985;2:128–35. [\[PubMed\]](#)

Appendix One - Conditions

Medicines for Self-care

The following minor illnesses can be treated effectively and safely using over the counter medicines.

Treatments for these conditions are no longer recommended on prescription

Aches and pains	Athlete's foot
Cold sores	Colic
Constipation	Coughs and colds
Dandruff	Diarrhoea
Mild dry skin	Ear wax
Fungal nail infections	Fungal skin infections - ringworm
Conditions which require food substitutes or supplementation without clear clinical need	Hayfever and allergies
Headache and migraine	Head lice
Heartburn and indigestion	Piles (haemorrhoids)
Upset stomach	Skin rashes inc. nappy rash
Other skin complaints inc. acne, sun protection, birthmarks, facial hair, bruising, tattoos, sweating	Sore throat
Teething & toothache	Threadworm
Travel medicines inc. travel sickness	Conditions which require vitamin , health supplements for prevention of deficiency including complimentary medicines.
Varicose veins	Vaginal thrush

For further advice on self-care and patient information sheets visit:

<http://www.selfcareforum.org/>