

# Community Pharmacy: at the heart of public health

## NHS Health Checks

The NHS Health Check programme is a national initiative to target adults between the ages of 40-74 years and enable them to get a clearer picture of their health and understand and manage their risk of vascular disease. Collectively, vascular diseases - heart disease, stroke, diabetes and kidney disease - affect the lives of more than four million people and kill 170,000 every year. They also account for more than half the mortality gap between rich and poor (1).

The check includes measuring BMI and physical activity levels and will help identify if adults are an unhealthy weight and, where appropriate, provide support or referral to a weight management service or physical activity opportunities to reduce their cardiovascular risk (2). The assessment can be carried out in a variety of settings, including pharmacy to help ensure that the service is accessible to all those eligible, including those in groups at highest risk of these diseases (3).

NHS Health Check service carried out in Islington PCT was found to be a successful, cost effective provision with potential to contribute usefully to public health improvement in Islington (4). The service showed that community pharmacies offering vascular risk assessments can attract groups of people that do not routinely approach GP services. Patient interviewees said that they '*did not want to bother GPs with screening test requests*' and a proportion appeared to prefer going to pharmacies for risk assessment services because they provide a less challenging environment than GPs' surgeries and cause less anxiety. The use of the service by ethnic groups was broadly in line with the makeup of the local population and service users positively valued the service.

NHS Health Checks present a major opportunity for community pharmacy to become more involved in supporting wellness and making public health interventions. The location of community pharmacies makes them an ideal venue from which to provide the service and there is an emerging evidence base that suggests that pharmacies can effectively target hard to access groups that use GPs' services very infrequently.

In Birmingham, across three PCTs and over six months, 9,500 males over the age of 40 were tested in community pharmacies and during this period, 65% of patients attending the service received onward GP referral:

- 36% were identified as having a high CVD risk;
- 30% were referred due to high blood pressure levels;
- 35% were referred due to high cholesterol levels;
- 18% were referred due to high blood glucose results.

The service had high user satisfaction and the programme aims, over time, to improve male life expectancy through encouraging behavioural change or early treatment of those with a raised cardiovascular risk (5).

## References

- 1) Putting prevention first. Vascular Checks: risk assessment and management. Department of Health (2008)
- 2) Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: 2 years on. Department of Health (2010)
- 3) Healthy Lives, Healthy People - our strategy for public health in England. Department of Health (2010)
- 4) Davies J, Taylor D, Bates I. *A Qualitative Evaluation of Islington Primary Care Trust's Pharmacy Based Cardiovascular Risk Assessment Pilot*. The School of Pharmacy, University of London (2009)
- 5) Doogan D. Improving Male Life Expectancy in Birmingham - working in partnership. NHS Improvement Programme (2009)

