



January 2014

Draft patient newsletters for discussion with local charity groups or possible use in LPC/Pharmacy Newsletters

Patient Newsletter 1: Getting help out of hours

Gaining access to the right sort of health care can be a daunting task in today's world, particularly if you happen to fall ill outside of regular hours. Access to GP appointments varies across the country; many hospitals are in crisis mode as A&E departments in particular struggle to cope with the pressure being put on them; and the NHS 111 service the government had hoped might provide a useful first port of call for patients with less serious problems has hardly taken off as they had hoped.

So are there any other options?

Well one possibility often overlooked by healthcare professionals and patients alike is the option to walk straight into a local pharmacy. Almost everyone will be familiar with at least one of these whether it is a recognised name with hundreds of branches across the country or a local independent business – there are around 11,500 pharmacies across England and 96% of the population can reach one by walking or public transport within 20 minutes.

You'll probably also know that you can go into your local pharmacy at any time during opening hours with a prescription to obtain your medicines. You may even have gone so far as to ask questions about a medicine. But what you might not realise is all the other things your local pharmacy could do for you. Here are just a few reasons why your local pharmacy could just end up being your best bet when things are not right.

Helping you to look after yourself

Of course you can go into any pharmacy and browse the medicines on sale over the counter to find something appropriate for your condition. But why not go a step further and ask the healthcare assistants or pharmacist for their advice? All pharmacies will be happy to advise on what might work best for any minor conditions, whether that is a medicine or other sort of treatment, and they can help you get the most out of any medicine you do take.

In some areas local health schemes even mean you can receive medicines for some common conditions without having to pay for them, so look out for signs for these minor ailments services in your area.

Healthcare advice in private surroundings

In recent years many pharmacies have undergone a transformation as they become centres for health and wellbeing providing a wider range of clinical services and advice to patients. To enable this, the majority have had consultation rooms fitted, which means you can talk to the pharmacist or other team members in complete privacy.

Is it your medicines?

Sometimes medicines can have unpleasant side-effects, or, if you are not using them quite correctly, they may not be working properly meaning an existing condition may not be being controlled or getting better. For example, taking some medicines at the wrong time of day can reduce their effect and taking others without food may lead to stomach pains. Research has also shown that huge numbers of people, including healthcare professionals, don't know how to use inhalers in the best possible way, even where they have been using them for years. Pharmacists are experts in medicines and can advise you about any of these issues to help you to get the very best out of your medicines.

Pointing you in the right direction

As well as helping you in the pharmacy, pharmacy teams will be able to point you in the direction of other healthcare support services and advise you on what additional help you may need, if necessary.

Helping you to stay healthy for longer

Improving the public's health has been big news in recent years and many pharmacies have been doing their bit to help. Pharmacies can offer advice on topics such as stopping smoking, eating and exercising healthily and contraception, so if you're wondering about changing your lifestyle for the better, ask a member of the team or the pharmacist for help.

Patient Newsletter 2: Getting Your Medicines Right

Anyone who remembers receiving their diagnosis of asthma or any other long-term condition will remember the feelings they felt at the time – shock, if they had not suspected it; perhaps fear, if they knew very little about the condition; and worry, that this would be something they would have to manage for the rest of their life.

But if all has gone well, anyone who was diagnosed some time ago may also know that their condition can be managed and does not need to rule their life. In the case of asthma and many other conditions, medicines can take a large part of the credit for that.

Yet despite treatment advances and the fact that some people can manage their conditions very well, we also know that some people are not so lucky, and that in many cases, incorrect use of their medicines is a factor.

Did you know that:

50% of medicines prescribed to treat long-term conditions are not taken as prescribed
20% of hospital admissions (30% for the elderly) may be due to people not taking their medicines properly in the US
£300m is thought to be spent by the NHS each year on medicines that are not used as prescribed

So what can be done to help both the NHS and the people whose conditions are poorly controlled? The good news for people with asthma is that two NHS community pharmacy services can have a really big impact and can help people to feel more confident using their inhalers, get the best results from their treatment and manage their condition more easily.

People with asthma can access the services at the majority of community pharmacies whether they are part of a chain or a local independent business.

Here we've given you the low down on both of these important services.

The NHS New Medicine Service

The what? The NHS New Medicine Service was introduced two years ago and is a service for people who have been newly prescribed a medicine to treat asthma or chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (and some other conditions) to help ensure they understand their medicines and don't have any problems with them.

When can I have it? Only people who have been newly prescribed a medicine for their asthma or COPD (or one of the other conditions) can receive this service.

How will it work? Your pharmacist will talk to you about your new medicine when you receive your first prescription. They will ask if you would like to take part in the service and if you would, they will arrange a time to speak to you once you have had some time to start taking or using the medicine. At that next discussion you will be able to ask any questions you have, raise any problems you have had with the medicines and check your inhaler technique (if the meeting is in person). Your pharmacist will then follow up with you in another 2-3 weeks giving you another opportunity to ask these questions and ensure you are getting the most out of your medicines.

Does it work? An analysis of data from pharmacies providing the service after it first started showed that pharmacists were able to ensure that nearly a third of patients who were not taking their medicines properly the first time they went back to talk to the pharmacist were taking them as intended by the next they spoke to the pharmacist.

NHS Medicines Use Reviews

NHS what? NHS Medicines Use Reviews have been provided by many community pharmacies for a number of years now and are again designed to give people a chance to ask questions about their medicines, raise concerns and make sure they getting as much benefit as they can out of them.

When can I have it? You are allowed to have one medicines use review per year with your local pharmacy, but you can have it at any stage of your treatment.

How will it work? The review is a conversation with your pharmacist – they will ask you questions about how you are getting on with your medicines and you will have the chance to ask anything you like about them and to check whether you are using your inhalers properly.

Does it work? One study on the Isle of Wight in 2010 looked at the effects of pharmacists talking to people about their medicines and helping to use their inhalers properly. The study analysed hospital data and found that over a three month period during which the conversations with pharmacists took place, only half of the number of people went to hospital due to asthma as had done previously.

If you have queries on these newsletters or would like further advice on communications please contact [Zoe Smeaton, Communications Manager](#).