

Over the Counter (OTC) Medicines Patient Engagement Survey – What you told us

What was the survey about?

Every year, the NHS in Norfolk and Waveney spends more than £5 million on routinely prescribing items for minor short-lived ailments such as paracetamol, remedies for indigestion or heartburn, allergy treatments, vitamin supplements and cream for dry skin. Your local NHS thought this was not a good use of precious NHS funds, and proposed that they would no longer routinely support the prescribing of medications for short-term and minor ailments.

The survey asked local people their views on this idea. It was open to the public from 1st – 24th November 2017, and was advertised in the local media, with patient groups and networks, and on the internet.

What questions did we ask?

We were interested to know:

1. How would people be affected if they were asked to buy certain over the counter medicines, instead of requesting a prescription for some minor conditions?
2. How would this affect someone they know or someone they care for?
3. Are there any other Over the Counter items they think we should add to the list?
4. Is there anything else they would like to tell us about this?

Who took part in the survey?

- 375 people completed the survey from all over Norfolk.
- They ranged in age from 18 to 85+ years but most people who responded (59%) were aged between 55 and 74 years.
- 55% said they had a long term condition or disability.
- 58% of people who responded were women.
- 21% said they would be directly affected by this proposal, 73% said they would not and 6% weren't sure.

What did we find out?

The people who responded gave us feedback and comments about themselves, and about their friends and relatives. They have been summarised and organised into the following themes:

Theme	Context
Cost	<p>Many statements of support for the proposal as a way of reducing cost pressures on the NHS.</p> <p>Support for the idea that the NHS is not 'free'.</p> <p>Feelings of 'entitlement' for those eligible for free prescriptions.</p> <p>Concerns that some people may struggle to afford the medicines.</p> <p>Concerns that people may go without OTC medicines leading to more complex health problems, or problems spreading.</p> <p>Concerns that pharmacies may raise their prices on OTC medicines as a result.</p> <p>Suggestion that pharmacies offer patients a range of options at different prices.</p>
Access	<p>Support for the idea because it increases access to healthcare without having to get a GP appointment.</p> <p>Concerns that reduced mobility and having to travel large distances, especially in rural areas can make getting to shops and pharmacies more difficult.</p>
Long Term Conditions	<p>Concerns that people with Long Term Conditions will no longer get medicines they need on prescription.</p> <p>Concerns about the restrictions on how many medicines such as painkillers that are needed for Long term Conditions can be bought over the counter.</p> <p>Concerns that people with certain long term conditions get all prescriptions free including those not related to that condition.</p>
Managing medicines	<p>Support for the idea to monitor and reduce medicines issued on repeat prescriptions – to reduce waste and avoid dangerously stockpiling medicines in people's homes.</p> <p>Concerns about getting access to advice about how to take medicines appropriately.</p> <p>Concerns that clinicians such as GPs and paramedics won't be aware of the OTC medicines people are taking alongside their prescribed ones.</p> <p>Concerns that pharmacists won't be aware of the prescribed medicines people are taking when selling OTC medicines.</p> <p>Concerns that pharmacists may require prescriptions for some OTC medicines for children.</p>
Definition of 'minor'	<p>Concerns about the definition of what constitutes a 'minor' ailment.</p> <p>Concerns that people are still able to see a medical professional.</p> <p>Concerns about privacy issues in pharmacies.</p> <p>Concerns that terms like 'allergies' covers many different levels of need.</p>

Cognitive challenges	Concerns that people with cognitive impairment e.g. dementia or learning difficulties may struggle to get advice from people they do not know.
Self-care	Support for the idea of people becoming more self-reliant of both minor ailments and Long Term Conditions. Support for the idea that items provided by the NHS should be limited.
Public awareness	Suggestion that there is a need for a public awareness campaign. Suggestion to regularly review the effects and keep the public updated about the savings being made.

What will we do as a result of what you told us?

We feel there is significant support from local clinicians and local people for our proposal to not routinely support the prescribing of medications for short-term and minor ailments. However, it is clear that there are concerns about how this might disadvantage some people.

Our proposal did not suggest that there should be any change to the way these medicines are prescribed for people with long term conditions. GPs will still be able to use their discretion to decide whether or not it is appropriate to prescribe these medicines. This will especially be the case where a GP thinks items are needed to help treat a long-term condition, or where medicines are needed in large quantities, for example to help treat chronic pain.

The CCGs will continue to work with local pharmacies and their professional body - the Norfolk Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) to continue their vital role in:

- ✓ providing access to professional advice about the use of medicines
- ✓ helping people self-manage short term and minor ailments as effectively as possible

All the concerns raised about pharmacies, patients with cognitive difficulties and managing medicines will be shared with the Norfolk LPC who will discuss this report with their members. The CCG will support practices and pharmacies where possible to implement any changes for the benefit of patients.

The CCGs agree that an awareness raising campaign is essential in helping people understand the benefits to patients and to the local NHS in not routinely supporting the prescribing of medications for short-term and minor ailments. The CCGs will work together on a local campaign about the cost of the medicines, and number of GP appointments used for minor ailments and common conditions. This will highlight how encouraging people to better self-care will enable the NHS to focus on caring for higher risk patients, such as those with complex needs, the very young and elderly, managing long-term conditions and providing new services.

We also asked people to suggest other items that they thought could be included in the list of medicines. Many of the suggestions were already included in the list

covered by this engagement survey, however, some were not. The list of over the counter medicines isn't absolute and will be subject to regular review by the CCGs and their medicines management teams in conjunction with the Norfolk LPC. The suggestions made by local people through his survey will be included in these discussions.

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