

**M**embers of the public are being encouraged to visit their local pharmacies for clinical advice

on minor illnesses, as part of NHS England's winter campaign activity.

The Help Us Help You Pharmacy Advice campaign, which runs until the end of March 2019, aims to ease pressures on urgent care services by building the public's trust in community pharmacies.

Research from the 2015 *Making Time in General Practice* report, commissioned by NHS England, shows that 27% of GP appointments in England could potentially be treated elsewhere and around 18 million of these could be treated through self-care and community pharmacies.

NHS England's Head of Pharmacy Integration, Anne Joshua, says the campaign aims to engender the confidence of the public in their local pharmacies. "These clinicians train for five years: they are very capable in managing common health concerns – such as coughs, colds, tummy troubles, and aches and pains – and can recognise warning signs and red flags."

### **BUILDING ON THE 2018 CAMPAIGN**

This is not the first time that NHS England has run a campaign to increase awareness of the role of community pharmacies.

The 2018 campaign targeted parents with young children under the age of five, using the strapline "Stay Well". It encouraged the public to go to their local pharmacy for support with minor health concerns and advice about how to look after themselves.

Anne says that the campaign was well received by parents, but the message about clinical advice was missed. "There was still a general view that you go to a pharmacy to learn about medicines, collect prescriptions and have a flu jab, rather than to access clinical advice about minor

# Building confidence in pharmacies

An NHS England campaign aims to position local pharmacies as the first port of call for clinical advice.

illnesses in young children."

NHS England chose a different strapline for the 2019 campaign: "Help Us Help You". We're building on the idea that we're in this together, explains Anne. "As part of that, we want pharmacists to be seen as the clinicians on the high street, who are local to the public, and integrated into the health system and working closely with GP colleagues."

The 2019 campaign is aimed at encouraging the working age adult to go to their local pharmacy for clinical advice. Anne says: "We're not focusing on children, it's the adults. Yes, they may have young children but this is a broader approach. We want to catch the working adult who is out and about and happens to have a terrible cold or woken up with tummy ache, and wonders where they can go."

### **BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE**

Increasing awareness of the role of community pharmacies needs sustained activity. "This isn't a one off piece of work," says Anne. "It's a whole behavioural change piece. Community pharmacies need to be integrated into the NHS healthcare system in the context of urgent care and linked up with general practice. We are keen to learn from the 2019 campaign and build on this for subsequent years."

As part of shifting behaviours, NHS England has been targeting BAME groups in this year's campaign.

Anne says: "I think that, generally, people recognise that community pharmacies are a good place to go, but culturally in some communities, the view is to go to A&E for everything, which has its challenges."

**"Community pharmacies need to be integrated into the NHS healthcare system in the context of urgent care"**



**Don't wait until you feel worse, ask us first.**

You can help us help you if you start to feel unwell with a winter illness.

Even if it's just a cough or cold, speak to your pharmacist before it gets more serious.

**HELP US HELP YOU**  
STAY WELL THIS WINTER

[nhs.uk/staywell](https://nhs.uk/staywell)

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
There are a total of **61** Help Us Help You resources available on the PHE website

## GP ENDORSEMENT

But the campaign is not just about changing public perceptions, it's about a cultural change among general practice and other urgent care services, adds Anne.

She says that NHS England has already begun to shift views among healthcare providers through a pilot scheme it is running with 111. Pharmacies in the North East, London and Devon are taking 111 referrals for minor illness; where 111 may have previously booked an appointment

with a GP or an out of hours provider, they are now offering face-to-face consultations with a pharmacist.

"The reception from urgent care has been tremendous. They are saying there is a key role for pharmacists here. If a pharmacy calls a GP surgery, the GPs are recognising that they are making the call for a good reason, rather than saying 'tell the patient to call the surgery' and the patient ending up in a loop."

As part of the campaign's social media activity, GPs have been endorsing

community pharmacies by saying they are the place to go for minor illnesses. Anne says this will help to build on and support the trust between healthcare professionals.

## THE ROLE OF PHARMACIES

Pharmacies have a key role to play in promoting the campaign's messages to the public. A range of resources, including stickers and posters, have been sent to all community pharmacies in England to display in their windows. Pharmacies are also being encouraged to hand out information cards to customers, to remind them to visit their local pharmacy the next time they need clinical advice about a minor health concern.

There are also free resources to order or download on the Public Health England website, including social media assets. Community pharmacies are being encouraged to join in the online conversations on social media.

Anne explains that the resources can be used all-year round, not just during the campaign. "Minor health concerns, such as tummy troubles and sore throats, are common in the summer too. It is about building the message that urgent care is under pressure all year round."

With an increase in demand from the public, pharmacies need to think about how they can make sure that their pharmacist is readily available to people walking in off the street.

Anne says: "There is a general view that you can see a pharmacist sooner than a GP. Staff need to quickly carry out their triage and tell the person that the pharmacist can help them. Pharmacies need to incorporate this approach into their work flow – this is challenging though and needs to be talked through as a team."