

Community pharmacies to offer over the counter advice and treatment for urinary tract infections

COMMUNITY pharmacies in the North East and North Cumbria have launched a new initiative to provide advice and treatment for uncomplicated urinary tract infections.

The six-month pilot scheme, aimed at women aged 16-64, will enable local pharmacists to treat patients with urinary tract infections (UTIs) without the need for a GP appointment or prescription, providing a more convenient option and faster access to treatment.

UTIs are one of the most common bacterial infections seen in female patients, with over 40 percent of women likely to suffer from one in their lifetime.

- Symptoms of a UTI include:
- Burning or stinging sensation on passing urine
- Needing to pass urine frequently or urgently
- Cloudy urine
- Passing excessive or large quantities of urine

Dr Neil O'Brien, executive medical director, North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) said: "More than 75,000 women in the North East and North Cumbria, aged between 16-64, presented at a GP practice with a UTI in the last six months.

"Consequently, UTIs take up a large proportion of resources within the healthcare system accounting for two-four percent of all GP appointments each year and ten percent of all extended appointments, outside of GP surgery hours.

"Previously, over-the-counter treatments could only offer relief from the symptoms of a UTI, this new pilot scheme will allow community pharmacists to give advice and appropriate treatment to address and treat the underlying bacterial infection causing the UTI – without the need for a GP appointment.

"Community pharmacists are highly trained and utilising them to improve access to care will not only offer a more convenient service for patients but also significantly reduce the demand on general practice and limit the number of unnecessary visits to emergency departments and other health care providers."

Dawn Cruickshank, superintendent pharmacist and chair of Community Pharmacy County Durham, added: "Patients are now using pharmacies much more as their first port of call for many minor ailments since start of the pandemic.

"This new pilot means that for the large number of patients that come into a community pharmacy with symptoms of a UTI we can now not only advise and support but also provide treatment, where appropriate, to treat the cause.

"Not all patients will need antibiotics but for those that do we can provide them quickly and conveniently, without the need to direct people to their GP practice for an appointment."

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