UNITED KINGDOM: STATUS OF SELF-CARE

The Value of Self-Care

Embedding self-care practices into the health care continuum has the potential to improve health and quality of life while simultaneously supporting health system sustainability. Self-care practices empower individuals by providing them with the information and tools to make decisions about their own health and care. An increased ownership over their own health promotes, at a systems level, the efficient use of limited healthcare resources and relieves the burden on healthcare providers - saving 1.8 billion physician hours to attend to more severe health conditions. A related impact of this is the increased focus on improving disease prevention efforts by empowering individuals to address minor ailments at home.

At a global level, current self-care activities are generating substantial monetary savings as well as healthcare workforce savings, totalling at least $119 billion (GBP 105) per year. The above should be coupled with a positive impact on global productivity when over-the-counter treatment is adopted at first, granting approximately 40.8 billion productive days, corresponding to a value of $1,879 (GBP 1161) billion in welfare effects. Looking at the future, the cost saving effect is estimated to be approximately $178.8 (GBP 158) billion per annum, with increased productivity gains of 71.9 billion productive days per annum. If we add other positive effects brought by other self-care practices, such as the use of preventive care, oral health care and the use of vitamins and mineral supplements, the overall gain will increase further.

There are more proven self-care products and practices available today than ever before, and it is within our collective power

to unleash the benefits of truly self-care enabled health systems around the world, if only we set up adequate policy frameworks that embed self-care seamlessly into the care continuum.

Self-care belongs to individuals, families, communities, health care professionals, and policymakers at different levels and with different responsibilities. However, it is a primary responsibility of policymakers to design the enabling environment for each of the stakeholders to fulfill these responsibilities.

A deeper international focus on self-care, brought up by a WHO Resolution on Self-Care could help foster the necessary momentum to fully integrate it into health systems for the benefit of individuals and society. This should include a definition of self-care and its enablers, and the self-care interventions countries can undertake according to the WHO Guidelines on self-care interventions for health and well-being. [1]

87% OF BRITISH PEOPLE FEEL CONFIDENT IN DEALING WITH SELF-TREATABLE CONDITIONS

92% OF BRITISH PEOPLE AGREE THAT IIT'S IMPORTANT FOR PEOPLE TO TAKE MORE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEIR OWN HEALTH

United Kingdom: Overview

The Department of Health and Social Care, which oversees care and the National Health Service (NHS) in England, defines self-care as, "the actions people take for themselves, their children and their families to stay fit and maintain good physical and mental health; meet social and psychological needs; prevent illness or accidents; care for minor ailments and long-term conditions; and maintain health and wellbeing after an acute illness or discharge from hospital." [2]

In an earlier PAGB survey, conducted in 2016, 92% of respondents agreed that it is important for people to take more responsibility for their own health to ease the burden on the NHS, and 87% said they were confident in dealing with self-treatable conditions.[3] However, self-care education remains a critical enabler, with 75% of respondents agreeing that NHS should be responsible for self-care education in a later, 2021 survey. [4]

The latest NHS Long-Term Plan, launched in 2019, puts emphasis on self-management of long-term conditions like diabetes and calls for pharmacists to support patients in increasing medication adherence as well as for a shift from prescription medicine to OTC drugs in order to reduce costs. In addition, NHS England supports a half-dozen apps focused on self-management of long-term conditions such as asthma, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and diabetes. [5]

A 2018 report from the Local Government Association stresses the economic benefit of increasing self-care and profiles how city and county councils are helping people look after themselves. [6] UK authorities have used studies on the economic benefits of self-care as the basis for policy decisions, recognising that self-care leads not only to sound financial stewardship of the National Health Service but also to efficient resource management, freeing up doctors to spend more time on complex patient case management. Guidelines published in April 2020 by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence found that prevention and self-care support interventions conducted by community pharmacists to help people stop smoking or manage their weight are cost-effective for the NHS. The same Guidelines recommend further evaluation of prevention and self-care interventions to showcase their medical and financial effectiveness. [7]

NHS Lambeth's Clinical Commissioning Group found that the London Borough of Lambeth spent over £1 million in 2016 on over-the-counter products that people could easily get without a prescription. To encourage people to practice self-care and avoid unnecessary (and costly) visits to GPs, NHS Lambeth no longer supports the routine prescribing of medications for common conditions such as headache, coughs, and colds. [8] NHS England has issued guidance in this regard.[9]

Recommendations

- Build on the PAGB and clinical coalition Blueprint, to establish a coherent healthcare policy and regulation supporting self-care.

- Recognise health literacy as a key enabler for health and self-care in particular, building on the work of PAGB and clinical coalition Blueprint.

- Assure the quality and expand accessibility of digital health information.

- Enable a favorable environment to switch more treatment to OTC in future.

End Notes

[1] WHO Guidelines on self-care interventions for health and well-being. World Health Organization, 2022. Available at:
https://app.magicapp.org/#/guideline/Lr21gL
[2] Association of the European Self-Care Industry (AESGP) proprietary databank; A. Adcock et al. "Medicinal product regulation and product liability in Thailand: overview." Thomson Reuters. 1 November 2020. Available at:
https://uk.practicallaw.thomsonreuters. com/6-500-8489?
transitionType=Default&contextData=
(sc.Default)&firstPage=true#co_anchor_a115816
[3] UK National Association of Primary Care. Annual Conference 2019. Available at: https://napc.co.uk/conference-2019/
[4] PGB Self-Care Survey 2021.
[5] "NHS Digital. "NHS App." Available at: https://digital.nhs.uk/services/nhs-app
[6] NHS Wales. "Designed to Smile." Available at: https://www.designedtosmile.org/welcome-croeso/welcome/
[7] National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. Public Health England. "Community pharmacies: promoting health and wellbeing." 2 August 2018. Available at: https://bit.ly/3pPSVTv.
[8] National Health Service Lambeth Clinical Commissioning Group. "Self-care with other the counter products." October 2017. Available at: https://bit.ly/3azEFrt.
[9] NHS England. "Prescribing of over the counter medicines is changing." 2018. Available at: https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/1a-over-the-counter-leaflet-v1.pdf

GLOBAL
SELF-CARE
FEDERATION

PAGB