

SELF CARE – A REAL CHOICE
SELF CARE SUPPORT – A PRACTICAL OPTION
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, JANUARY 2005

There is growing evidence to show that supporting self care leads to:

- Better symptom management, such as reduction in pain, anxiety, depression and tiredness.
- Improved feeling of well being.
- Increase in life expectancy.
- Improvement in quality of life with greater independence.
- Visits to GPs falling by up to 40%.
- Outpatient visits reducing by up to 50%.
- Hospital admissions falling by up to 50%.
- Hospital length of stay reducing.
- Medicines intake being regulated or reduced.
- Days off work reducing by up to 50%.

Self care was highlighted in the NHS Plan as one of the key building blocks in its vision of a health service designed around the patient. Self care also features in the NHS Improvement Plan (2000) and in the National Standards.

Strategic priorities for the NHS over the next 5 years will be care of long-term conditions, improved access and patient experience together with greater choice and personalisation of care. Self care is integral to all of these priorities.

Even a small percentage increase in self care of long-term conditions can have a huge impact on demand for professional services.

Advice for patients about medicines is a type of support for self care for people with long term conditions. This includes information to improve patients' understanding of the usefulness and action of medicines; of side effects and how to take care of the effects.

It is for the individual to decide how they want to be involved in their own care. We should encourage more individual responsibility where this is appropriate and where the person has the capacity and desire to contribute to their own health as well as that of their children and families. But we must not forget that it is for the individual to make that choice.

People need skills and techniques to take care of themselves. These include:

- Problem solving.
- Planning, decision making and taking actions to fulfil plans.
- Controlling and taking care of symptoms.
- Utilising supportive resources.
- Developing effective partnerships with practitioners.

How professionals, practitioners, staff and statutory agencies can work together with patients and the public to promote self care support:

- Support self care using a mix of approaches.
- Disseminate evidence and inform practitioners on benefits of self care support for patients and the public and how it can help achieve targets re-train professionals and staff to provide self care advice, education and training to patients.
- Develop health trainer or self care trainer role.
- Provide condition-specific personalised care plans for people with long-term conditions.
- Develop partnerships between agencies in the community to provide user-led social support.
- Encourage community peers to provide help to others on how to use health information.
- Encourage people with similar problems to keep in touch and support each other in the community.
- Develop joint training and education programmes for care of people with specific conditions.

Risks

- Public and patient capacity to self care can often be undermined by factors such as poverty, access to resources or poor housing.
- There may be need for a ‘graduated learning and access’ approach to self care.

Over the coming months the Department of Health will:

- Provide a number of local NHS and social care based as well as other good practice examples in self care support with contact details; a first survey of such activities across the whole system of care is available on the self care support website at <http://www.dh.gov.uk/SelfCare>
- Support the development of three programmes on developing online directories of self care support initiatives and community networks.
- Provide emerging evidence on the benefits of the Expert Patients Programme.
- Provide published research evidence on the effectiveness of different approaches to self care support.
- Provide examples of self care support networks in local communities.