



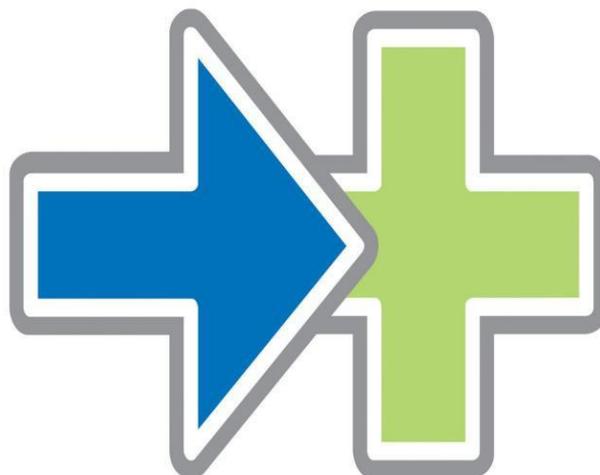
**Health and Social  
Care Board**

## **SUPPORTING SELF-CARE**

**COMMUNITY PHARMACY MINOR AILMENTS  
SERVICE**

**January 2019**

**GP Practice Receptionists' Protocol**



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## **Section 1            Introduction**

Community Pharmacists already advise patients on a wide range of minor ailments and either recommend treatment or refer on to another healthcare professional. The NI Minor Ailments Service builds upon this expertise allowing community pharmacists to supply some treatments, if they are considered necessary, free of charge to eligible patients on the health service. There is no cost to the practice for this service.

A minor ailment service within community pharmacy improves patient access to health care services and encourages the use of pharmacy as a first point of call for health consultations for minor ailments. This reduces the demands that such consultations can make on GPs time.

Community pharmacies are well placed within communities and offer an open door to everyone. There are over 500 pharmacies across Northern Ireland with a pharmacist on hand to offer free independent health advice.

Therefore provision of a minor ailments service from community pharmacies:

- Encourages patients to self-treat minor ailments.
- Supports the use of the pharmacy as a first point of call for health advice and allows the pharmacist to make more use of their professional skills.
- Improves patient accessibility to treatment without the need of an appointment.
- Benefits other parts of the healthcare service particularly Emergency Departments and Out-Of-Hours medical services.

This protocol is intended to help receptionists when they are recommending patients to use the Community Pharmacy Minor Ailments Service. It should be used in conjunction with the Patient Information leaflet to allow patients to make a choice. It may also be linked to information about making an appointment with the most appropriate healthcare professional.

## **Section 2            Procedure**

If a patient telephones or calls at a surgery for a prescription or an appointment, they will often describe their symptoms unasked. If the symptoms are among those included in the minor ailments service, the receptionist may:

- Explain that they may obtain advice and treatment from a participating pharmacist without having to wait for an appointment with a doctor
- Ensure that the patient is aware that they have a choice.

### **For patients making an appointment by telephone**

- If the patient is telephoning a request for a routine appointment, the receptionist must avoid directly asking what the problem is. The receptionist may, using his/her judgement, discern that the request is related to a minor ailment. If so, the receptionist could say to the patient: **“You may not be aware that there is a Minor Ailments Service operating in the area. Patients may go to a participating pharmacy to receive advice and treatment rather than having to wait for an appointment. The ailments included in the Service are ... [Acne Vulgaris, Athlete’s foot, Acute Diarrhoea, Ear wax, Groin area infection, Haemorrhoids, Head lice, Mouth ulcers, Scabies, Threadworms, Oral thrush, Vaginal thrush or Verrucae]. Does your illness come into any of these categories?”**
- If the patient says yes, the receptionist may then ask if they would like to use this Service rather than coming to see the doctor. It is important to note that this should be left to the patient to make their choice.

### **For patients making an appointment in person**

- If the patient is presenting in person, the receptionist should, using the same terminology as before, inform them that there is a Service in operation and that they can be directed to a local pharmacist for advice and treatment rather than waiting for an appointment.
- Each patient should be given a leaflet explaining the Service.

### **For all patients**

- Patients may receive advice only, or advice and treatment after appropriate assessment by the pharmacist. If medication is required, it will be supplied from the agreed formulary free-of-charge.
- Patients are expected to attend the pharmacy in person.
- If a patient chooses not to take advantage of the Service then an appointment with the GP should be made in the normal way.
- Advise patients that they can use any of the pharmacies that are part of the Service.

### **Good practice points**

- Following transfer onto the Service it is good practice to record this in the patient's notes or computer record
- Include the appropriate read code

## **Section 3          Conditions**

1. Acne Vulgaris
2. Athlete's Foot
3. Acute Diarrhoea
4. Ear Wax
5. Groin Area Infection
6. Haemorrhoids
7. Head Lice
8. Mouth Ulcers
9. Scabies
10. Threadworms
11. Oral Thrush
12. Vaginal Thrush
13. Verrucae

## **Section 4      Age Limits**

The service is only available to patients aged over 3 months. However, not every medication listed on the service formulary is suitable for all patients. The service matches the over-the-counter licensed age ranges for the included medications.

The minimum age of a patient that can be treated under the Minor Ailment Service is 3 months, irrespective of whether or not the product license covers use in younger children. For some medicines, the minimum age limit is greater than 3 months.

### **Inappropriate Referrals**

1. If a GP has made a decision about the medicine a patient needs, then a prescription must be issued. A GP cannot write a prescription for one item and refer the patient to the Service for another named item.

**Please note: Pharmacists will refer patients back to the surgery if they are inappropriately referred into the service.**

## **Section 5      Fast Track Referral System**

**If the patient presents at the pharmacy with symptoms indicating the need for an immediate consultation with the GP, a locally agreed method for urgent referral should be instigated.**

This may be

1. A locally agreed referral form;
2. Patient advised to telephone the surgery;
3. The pharmacist telephoning the surgery on the patient's behalf.

Therefore, GP practices and pharmacists are encouraged to establish a local fast track referral system that suits their needs.

## **Section 6                      Promoting the Service**

Practices may wish to promote the service through a variety of means for example:

- Leaflets and posters – use HSCB materials
- Recording a message on the telephone system
- Displaying a message on electronic notice systems or practice website

Ultimately, whatever way the practice chooses to promote this service, consideration should be given to ensuring patients are given the appropriate information in order to avail of the service and to maximise benefits.

Please contact your local HSCB office if you have any queries.

Belfast Office: 028 9536 3926  
South Eastern Office: 028 9536 1461  
Southern Office: 028 9536 2104  
Northern Office: 028 9536 2845  
Western Office: 028 9536 1010

## Section 7- Minor Ailments Service Flow Chart – GP Referral

