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Cumbria leads the way in England with Pharmacist and GP joint working

Posted on Friday 17th April 2015

In a further development to Cumbria's Community Pharmacy Minor Ailment Scheme (MAS), a pharmacist from Barrow-in-Furness has successfully completed a Non-Medical Prescribing course. In addition to this and for the first time in England, an innovative IT solution has been developed so the pharmacist can legally access GP records to safely prescribe medicines for patients, which would normally require a prescription from a GP.

NHS Cumbria Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) launched the first phase of the Community Pharmacy Minor Ailment Scheme in May last year as a pilot scheme. The scheme started seeing positive results immediately with patients using their local pharmacy for minor ailments, help and advice rather than making a GP appointment. Due to the success of the pilot, it was then rolled out to all pharmacies across the Furness peninsula and the scheme has since been launched in Copeland and South Lakes as part of a successful first phase.

Since the initial launch and as a second phase of the Community Minor Ailment Scheme, NHS Cumbria CCG has been working in partnership with the Cumbria Local Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) and Cumbria Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (CPFT), in conjunction with Healthcare Gateway, who provide IT solutions for healthcare organisations, to enable the pharmacist in Barrow-in-Furness to access GP records safely and securely. It is hoped that if the second phase of the scheme is successful at Barrow, this innovative service will also be rolled out to all the pharmacies taking part in the MAS.

Hazel Smith, NHS Cumbria CCG's Primary Care Development Lead said: "Enabling the pharmacist to link together with GP practices is a great step forward; improves the information available about the patient for everyone involved in their care and allows the pharmacist to prescribe medication safely and legally. Working together and sharing information has huge benefits for the patient and GP practices and is the way forward in the future."

Pharmacist at Murrays Pharmacy in Ormsgill, Gareth Jones added: "The Community Minor Ailment Scheme has been a huge success here in Ormsgill and has proved very popular with patients. With the support of Murrays I have now been able to complete all the requirements and training of the Non-Medical Prescribing course and can access a patient's record at their GP practice with their consent. I record the advice given and the products prescribed and this is sent direct to the GP practice so the patients record is updated. I can now supply a wider range of medication than the standard minor ailments service including those only available with a prescription once I have carried out a clinical assessment."

Ian Harrison, Programme Manager, e-Health Cumbria, CPFT, said: "This was a complex project that involved working with GPs, NHS Cumbria CCG and the pharmacy. As the pharmacy is an independent organisation, outside of the NHS, then there were a number of technical and governance issues which had to be resolved before the access to the GP record could be granted. The approach taken by all has meant Cumbria has succeeded in developing a safe, innovative, solution which will help to ease pressure on the Primary Care service in the area."

Patients who are exempt from paying for prescriptions often attend a GP appointment purely to get a prescription when they could just visit their local pharmacist for over the counter medicines. Pharmacies can provide health advice to anyone without the need for an appointment, therefore freeing up GP appointments for people who do need to see a doctor with a more serious illness. This is also more convenient for the patient, enabling them to make one visit to the pharmacy rather than a trip to their GP and the pharmacy

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