

Gearing up for “Ask about medicines” week — how you can get involved

“Ask about medicines” week, a campaign designed to promote concordance, will take place from 12 to 18 October.

Debbie Andalo finds out how some primary care trusts are gearing up for the campaign

COMMUNITY pharmacists may put eye-catching stickers on medicine bottles and information leaflets in dispensary bags as part of a national campaign to promote concordance. They may also visit pensioner luncheon clubs to help encourage the elderly to ask questions about their medicines and learn to play a greater role in developing their treatment plan in consultation with their pharmacist, general practitioner or other health professional.

These are just some of the ideas being discussed by Hinckley and Bosworth Primary Care Trust in Leicestershire about the part that community pharmacists can play during “Ask about medicines” week, which takes place across England and Wales in October. The PCT’s senior prescribing adviser Kim Dunn, who has worked both as a community and hospital pharmacist, said: “We don’t want to use stickers and leaflets all the time because they lose their impact but I think as a one-off they can be valuable in getting a message across.”

The PCT, which covers 16 pharmacies in a rural area across Leicestershire and Warwickshire, is also considering placing advertisements on the outside of buses to help encourage people to think about their medicines and seek advice from their local pharmacist. Mrs Dunn added: “This would be quite a useful way of reaching a variety of people across the whole population.”

HOSPITAL PHARMACISTS CAN HELP

The PCT is also hoping to involve pharmacists working in its two community hospitals during the campaign. Mrs Dunn said: “I think there is a lot that hospital pharmacists can do to help. They can talk to patients before they are discharged and locally we have already had some discussion about developing self-administration of medicines in these units.”

The “Ask about medicines” week campaign is also focusing on the way that hospital pharmacists can help promote concordance, although details of what steps they can take are still being finalised. However Helen Remington, immediate past president of the Guild of Health Care Pharmacists and a member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s Council, said that the national targets in the National Service Framework for Older People illustrate how hospital pharmacists can help patients understand more about their medicines. At Addenbrooke’s Hospital in Cambridge, where Mrs Remington is chief pharmacist, a toolkit has been developed to help patients self-administer their medicines. It is kept in a bedside locker to help promote compli-

ance and reduce medicines wastage. She said: “The hospital also has a medicines help line which patients can ring for advice.”

Other PCTs are looking at how pharmacists in the community and hospital sectors can contribute to the campaign. In Surrey the campaign provides the first opportunity for its five PCTs to work together across the county. Pharmaceutical advisers are busy recruiting volunteers from primary care — including pharmacists, nurses and health visitors — to hand out leaflets promoting concordance at busy commuter railway stations. They are also hoping to encourage hospital pharmacists to find time to discuss patients’ medicines with them at the dispensary during the campaign week from 12–18 October.

Gabby Clezy, pharmaceutical adviser at East Elmbridge and Mid Surrey PCT, said: “Each of the PCTs has contributed £150 towards the campaign and we are already in the process of recruiting volunteers to hand out leaflets to commuters and shoppers during the week.” The leaflets are based on “Ask about medicines” week material and point out the kinds of questions patients can ask health professionals about their medicines, such as “What does this medicine do?” and “How long do I need to take it?”, as well as questions about possible side effects. A campaign poster has also been designed which may be displayed in Surrey’s 200 pharmacies. Education days for pharmacists to discuss the management of epilepsy — one of five chronic conditions targeted during the week — are also planned. Mrs Clezy added: “We are hoping to get some patient group involvement so that we can look at the kinds of questions they want the pharmacist to answer. I think the ‘Ask about medicines’ week is a fantastic idea because we have already been doing a

lot of work on medicines management and medicines review. I think it will help pharmacists understand that they need to give people the authority to feel they are able to ask questions and also to be able to answer them in way that the patient understands.”

Sally Greensmith, community pharmacy facilitator for Guildford and Waverley, North Surrey and Woking area PCTs and a member of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society’s Council, said: “We are in discussion with our local drug information unit at the Royal Surrey County Hospital in Guildford, which is keen to get involved in the campaign, and may distribute leaflets during the week. Another benefit of this campaign is that our PCTs are very much in their early days and we hope PCTs will better understand the role that the community pharmacist can play and the resource that they are.”

THEMED JOURNALS PLANNED

The “Ask about medicines” week campaign, which will include special themed editions of *The Pharmaceutical Journal* and the *BMJ*, is being run by a consortium made up of the Medicines Partnership (a Government-backed initiative to promote concordance), the Doctor Patient Partnership (a British Medical Association organisation set up to improve the relationship between doctors and their patients) and PECMI (Promoting Excellence in Consumer Medicines Information, a group devoted to improving patient medicines information). The intention is that the campaign and associated events will trigger a sea change in the relationship between health professionals, their patients and their medicines.

The campaign will be officially launched at the House of Commons on October 9.

Campaign materials delivered in September

EVERY community pharmacist in England and Wales will receive an “Ask about medicines” week starter kit in September. It will provide advice about how to achieve local publicity — including a press release template — and details of a model patient consultation to help encourage a discussion about medicines. Suggested questions include “Are any of your medicines bothering you?” and “How are you getting on with your medicine?”. The pack will also include 200 credit card sized “Ask about medicines” prompt cards, which come as part of a campaign leaflet but can be pushed out and kept for future reference. The card, funded by the National Patient Safety Agency, suggests five key questions that patients can ask about their medicines, such as “Should I avoid any other medicines, drinks, foods or activities when I am taking it?” and “How and when should I take it?”.

Wendy Harris, senior pharmacist at the NPSA, said: “The card will play a key role in involving patients and their carers in decisions about their medicines and will support pharmacists as the front line experts in medicines.”