

Integrating self care into primary care

Community pharmacy is given prominent billing in the Working in Partnership Programme's new book on self care. Tom Moberly reports

Next week, the Working in Partnership Programme (WiPP) will publish a book, launch a website and host a conference, all focusing on self care in primary care.

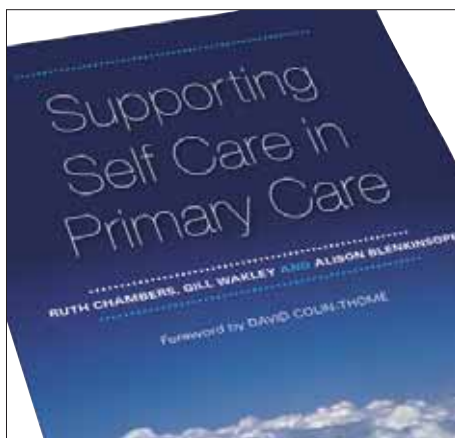
These three projects represent the fruit of over 18 months' work from the team behind WiPP's "Self care for primary care" project, Helena Stone, WiPP's national project manager, self care for primary care, says. "The 'Self care for primary care' project aims to develop professions' skills around self care so that patients feel more empowered to undertake their own self care," she explains.

Supporting self care in primary care

The major output of the "Self care for primary care" project will be the "Supporting self care in primary care" book, written by Ruth Chambers, professor of primary care at Staffordshire University, Gill Wakley, visiting professor in primary care at Staffordshire University, and Alison Blenkinsopp, professor of the practice of pharmacy at Keele University, and with a foreword by David Colin-Thomé, the Department of Health's national clinical director for primary care. The book aims to encourage interactive professional learning and development, and to highlight the importance of, and benefits that can result from, self care in the workplace.

The book includes a number of "tools" to help with planning and supporting self care, as well as examples of how self care can appear from a patient's perspective. The examples are used to examine problems that can occur, to consider what can be done to improve the system, to think about how to clarify who should be doing what and how consistent self care messages can be conveyed.

However, the book is not meant to be over-prescriptive, Ms Stone stresses. "We did not want the book to say 'this is the way you must implement self care'. Because there is so much variety across primary care services, that would not have worked anyway," she says. "What we really want is for the book to



give people ideas and to guide them in building self care into their primary care strategy."

Community pharmacy's role

A whole chapter, by Professor Blenkinsopp, of the "Supporting self care in primary care" book focuses on how community pharmacy teams can design and implement a self care strategy.

She emphasises that pharmacy needs to work with other providers to make self care work. "Pharmacy teams cannot promote self care in isolation from other health care professionals and their teams, and it is more important than ever that patients and the public receive consistent messages about self care," she writes.

She also looks in some detail at the role of self care in the new community pharmacy contract in England and Wales, particularly the requirement for pharmacy staff to record purchases and referrals that the pharmacist deems to be clinically significant.

"This requirement for record keeping is the first time that there has been an explicit acknowledgement of the role of pharmacy advice and treatment for self-limiting conditions within the NHS," she stresses. "It is also the first time that community pharmacy's contribution to clinical care has been documented."

The long-term value of recording such purchases and referrals will depend, Professor Blenkinsopp argues, on whether pharmacists and other members of the primary care team use the documentation when they follow up patients. "These records will become increasingly important as more treatments for intermittent and long-term conditions switch from prescription-only to over-the-counter status," she says. "Auditing records for what advice has been given, and how, will enable pharmacists to review their standards of care and safety and make plans for improvement."

Professor Blenkinsopp also emphasises the importance of delivering consistent messages on self care, a point that is also driven home

in the illustrative patient pathways included in the book.

"Community pharmacists are one source of advice and treatment about minor illnesses in primary care," Professor Blenkinsopp writes. But, she adds, there are a wide and increasing variety of routes patients could use in addition to community pharmacies. "Patients might see their GP or a nurse in a general practice-based, nurse-led minor illness clinic or a NHS walk-in centre or seek advice from the NHS direct range of services."

However, the growing number of different settings and health professionals involved in self care increases the risk of people receiving differing advice, she says. She examines the ways in which patients might receive conflicting messages about self care and puts forward the example of patient information leaflets, produced by primary care trusts and shared between pharmacies and GP surgeries, as one way of ensuring self-care messages given to patients are consistent.

Ms Stone agrees that joining up work at GP surgeries and community pharmacies is key to increasing the consistency of self care messages. "We have tried in the book to connect practices with community pharmacy," she says. When a practice is starting a self care initiative, that should be co-ordinated with what pharmacies are doing by, at the very least, making pharmacists aware of the scheme or, for instance, by setting up a patient group direction minor ailments service, she says.

The pharmacy chapter also provides a list of actions needed to "Make it happen", including the actions needed to develop self care in the essential services of the community pharmacy contract in England and Wales, self care roles and responsibilities within the pharmacy team, patient and public awareness of new pharmacy services, quality and audit arrangements and stronger links within primary care.

In particular, Professor Blenkinsopp recommends that pharmacy teams consider nominating a member of staff to lead on self care support and that teams should ensure that locums can provide seamless care and have relevant accreditation for advanced services. She also suggests that pharmacy teams could, together with local PCTs, produce a leaflet summarising information about prescription-linked interventions, including details of any changes that might be made to their prescriptions and of why these changes may need to be made.

The ultimate aim of a strategy to support self care should be, Professor Blenkinsopp argues, to create "a culture whereby supporting self care is integral to all your developments and services, making the most of local initiatives and the pharmacy contract".

Website and conference

To complement the book, WiPP has produced a website, available via www.wipp.nhs.uk, which contains further tools and a training package. The "Supporting self care in primary care" book and website will be launched at a WiPP conference in London on 31 October. "Self care — turning rhetoric into reality" aims to show how a sustainable self care strategy can be successfully integrated into primary care and to allow those involved in self care strategies to find out about what other people have achieved and how they have done it. Further information is available from www.wipp.nhs.uk.