

UNSCHEDULED CARE BACKGROUND

Unscheduled care can be described as:

“NHS care which cannot reasonably be foreseen or planned in advance of contact with the relevant healthcare professional, or is care which, unavoidably, is out with the core working period of NHS Scotland. It follows that such demand can occur at any time and that services to meet this demand must be available 24 hours a day.”

In the past the largest group of patients requiring unscheduled care tended to use one of the following routes:

- an urgent appointment with their GP
- advice from NHS 24
- referral to the Out of Hours service via NHS 24

Service developments in community pharmacy have led to pharmacies becoming an important access route for people requiring unscheduled care particularly over weekends and public holidays. Examples of the tools available to pharmacists include:

- the National Patient Group Direction for the Urgent Supply of Current Prescribed Medicines, Appliances and ACBS products
- Community Pharmacy Direct Referral to local Out of Hours services
- the NHS Minor Ailment Service which has established community pharmacy as the first port of call for the treatment of minor or routine ailments

NHS 24

NHS 24 is a confidential telephone health advice and referral service integrated with all 14 NHS boards and the Scottish Ambulance Service. It acts as the front end to local out of hours services, which are provided by individual local NHS Boards during the out of hours period when GP surgeries are closed (evenings, weekends, public holidays, protected learning time).

NHS 24 links with existing services so that, if people need to be seen by a clinician, they will be cared for by the local out of hours service. The provision of local out of hours services remains the responsibility of each individual local NHS Board. NHS 24 acts as a ‘gateway’ for patients needing urgent access to out of hours services.

NHS 24 clinicians within the contact centres around the country will assess and triage the calls they receive. They may explain how the patient can look after themselves at home or they may forward them to a local NHS board out of hours service. There are no patient records available at NHS 24 and all GPs are based at the out of hours centres not within the NHS 24 contact centres.

NHS 24 is designed to help the patient get the right care from the right people at the right time. The community pharmacy should be the first port of call for access to medicines and minor ailments and can assess whether the patient needs treatment or advice. If a patient needs to be seen in the out of hours period please refer to section 5 for guidance on how to use the direct referral service to avoid unnecessary calls to NHS 24.