

Unscheduled Care

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 used one of the following routes:

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

Service developments in community pharmacy have seen pharmacies become an important access route for people requiring unscheduled care particularly over weekends and public holidays. Pharmacists now have a range of clinical tools available, mainly:

- National Patient Group Direction for the Urgent Provision of Medicines, Appliances and ACBS products
- Community Pharmacy Direct Referral/Prof to Prof communication options with GP OOH services
- NHS Pharmacy First Scotland and Pharmacy First Plus services

Use of these tools has helped establish community pharmacy as the first port of call for the treatment of a range of minor illnesses and ailments

NHS 24

NHS 24 is a national health board operating a confidential telephone health advice and referral service integrated with all 14 NHS boards and the Scottish Ambulance Service. It acts as a ‘gateway’ for people looking to access unscheduled care services and in particular their local GP 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).

NHS 24 clinicians working in contact centres around the country will assess and triage calls they receive. They may explain to callers how to look after themselves at home, or they may be passed on to a local NHS board GP OOH service for further assessment/treatment. The provision of local GP OOH services remains the responsibility of each individual local NHS Board. It is important to note there are no patient records available to NHS 24 or the local GP OOH service, and that all **OOH GPs are not based within NHS 24** contact centres, but based in local OOH centres in your board.

NHS 24 is designed to help the patient get the right care from the right people at the right time, first time. Community pharmacy is regarded the first port of call for access to medicines and minor ailments, as is a valued partner for NHS 24. The pharmacist can assess whether someone needs treatment or advice, and if they need to be seen OOH the Health Board Direct Referral/prof to prof number can be used to discuss this with an OOH GP. This avoids the need for patients to make unnecessary calls to NHS 24 and avoids delay in them receiving the care they need.