

New Professional 'Guidelines' for treating Colds and Flu

Concerns have recently been raised about the over-prescribing of antibiotics - particularly with reference to colds and flu and other self-treatable viruses and ailments. Antibiotic resistance has resulted, as well as unnecessary pressure on the NHS through wasted GP hours. According to PAGB research*, 39% of GP time is spent dealing with patients suffering from self-treatable minor ailments such as colds and flu.

The Consumer Health Information Centre (CHIC) is now in the first stages of developing Guidelines on the Treatment of Colds and Flu. The Guidelines will be aimed at health professionals and consumers and will initially be made available to the public through GPs, pharmacists and nurses.

Baroness Hayman, Government Minister for Health said, in support of the campaign,

"I am pleased to see the CHIC campaign on colds and flu this year and the helpful advice being given on the symptoms. These are caused by viruses and while unpleasant, cannot be cured by antibiotics. Helping people to recognise the symptoms of a cold and to differentiate between colds and flu, what to do for self help and when to go to the doctor, is the kind of information people need. I also welcome the CHIC plans to develop guidelines on self-treatment to be shared between doctors, pharmacists and patients. The Government produced the NHS Home Healthcare Guide earlier this year to give people useful information and helpful tips on how to help themselves at home with a range of minor illnesses. This is part of our strategy to make more advice and information available at home."

The CHIC also hopes to gain endorsement for the guidelines from, the Royal College of General Practitioners, the Royal College of Nursing, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and other relevant bodies once they have been developed. Once finished, their aim will be twofold. To guide and endorse health professionals and to educate consumers on the most effective course of treatment for colds and flu.

The Guidelines will be produced over the next few months with an expected launch date of January 1999.

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*PMSI Research 1996