Health Inequalities – Early Years

Community Pharmacy Scotland

Background
Community Pharmacy Scotland is the organisation which represents community pharmacy contractor owners in almost every aspect of their working lives, and is the voice of these vital healthcare professionals as they deliver pharmaceutical care to the people of Scotland.

It is empowered to represent the owners of 1250 of Scotland’s community pharmacies and negotiates on their behalf with the Scottish Government on all matters of terms of service and contractors’ NHS service activity including remuneration and reimbursement for the provision of NHS pharmaceutical services.

What do we do?
Community Pharmacy Scotland works with the Scottish Government on the development of new pharmaceutical care services and works to ensure that the framework exists to allow the owners of Scotland’s community pharmacies to deliver these services.

The Scottish community pharmacy contract puts the care of the individual right at its centre and with its focus on pharmaceutical care and improving clinical outcomes, community pharmacists are playing an increasingly important role in maximising therapeutic outcomes and improving medicine safety. Community pharmacy is at the heart of every community, is found more often in deprived areas than other healthcare professions and plays an important part in the drive to ensure that the health inequalities are tackled.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence.

1. How effective are early years interventions in addressing health inequalities?
Upstream measures to prevent ill health occurring have to be positive. It is difficult to quantify how successful these approaches are against a complex socio-economic backdrop. The overwhelming factor in Health Inequalities is the social structure children grow up in. This can't be tackled by one area of policy alone.

2. What are your views on current early years policy in Scotland in terms of addressing health inequalities?
In relation to community pharmacy we have universal access to the NHS Minor Ailment Scheme for children, promoting self-care and good health in an accessible healthcare environment. A healthcare professional is also available to provide information and advice for parents with concerns about the health of their children.
The smoking cessation service is also universally available to all over 13 years of age. It can offer renewed support through pregnancy for a young mother looking to quit.
We also have the Healthy Start Vitamin pilot which has improved access to vitamins but too many barriers still exist for the target population. Interventions can often be initiated too late - an example being that of a pregnant woman who requires vitamin supplements. This intervention often happens after conception and after the first trimester. To improve access and uptake community pharmacies should be enabled to initiate supply of the supplements.

We think there is mileage in developing the role of community pharmacies in areas of deprivation as a healthcare hub –and through the establishment of links with other healthcare professionals offering enhanced support to families in that area.

3. What role can the health service play in addressing health inequalities through interventions in the early years?
The principles of SG policy around Early Years are to be commended. The Core 10 measurements are subject to robust criteria and we support SG with these objectives.

4. What barriers and challenges do early years services face when working to reduce health inequalities?
We would hope Health and Social Care Integration would address many of the barriers at a local level. We are also aware of many healthcare professionals working in silos in this field within the NHS. Particular issues arise between primary and secondary care and different parts of primary care. Appropriate development of referral pathways would create a coherent approach where appropriate sharing of relevant information could help. This currently doesn't always occur.

5. Are there any specific initiatives or research evidence from Scotland, UK or internationally that you would wish to highlight to the health and Sport Committee?
We have nothing further to add here.

Community Pharmacy Scotland
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