

The Pharmacy Practice Research Trust



Medicines & People

Turning Knowledge Into Know-How

Media release for immediate use

11 March 2008

The benefits of community pharmacy for minor ailments advice needs reinforcing says new research study

People are more likely to visit their GP for advice on minor ailments as opposed to their local pharmacy even if it results in a short consultation suggests a research report published by the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust.

Dr Dyfrig Hughes from the Centre for Economics and Policy in Health at Bangor University, and health economists at the University of Glamorgan, investigated factors influencing user choices to visit either general practitioners or community pharmacists in the management of minor ailments by piloting a discrete choice experiment to assess their relative importance to users.

Eight user focus groups in Wales identified key attributes to be included in a experiment which would affect the patient's decision about where to go to discuss a minor ailment and these included: when seen, length of consultation, travel time to visit, location of consultation ie GP surgery v community pharmacy and cost.

An analysis of the discrete choice experiment indicated that respondents on average preferred consultations that were lengthier, more accessible (both in terms of waiting time and travel time) and at a lower cost. Respondents

...2

....2

preferred a longer consultation with their GP and a shorter consultation at their pharmacy. With all else being equal, except for location of the consultation, the vast majority of respondents chose the option that offered the doctor's surgery as opposed to the pharmacist.

“The results of the discrete choice experiments indicate there is potential to improve the efficiency of policies aimed at increasing the use of community pharmacies in the management of minor illnesses” said Dr Dyfrig Hughes. “Policy makers need to reinforce the benefits of the immediate and local availability of community pharmacies that can offer brief consultations, often at less or the same cost as consulting a GP to receive a prescription medicine. Users’ strong preference to see a GP, coupled with the availability of free prescriptions in Wales may, however, conspire against achieving these policy aims.”

For further media information contact:

Bonnie Green

tel: 07774 650 391

email: bonnie.green@rpsgb.org

Notes to editors:

1. Investigating factors influencing user choices to visit either general practitioners or community pharmacists in the management of minor ailments – piloting a discrete choice experiment. Dr Dyfrig Hughes, Centre for Economics and Policy in Health, Bangor University, Dr Susan Myles, Miss Mirella Longo & Mrs Cathy Lises, Health Economics & Policy Research Unit, University of Glamorgan
<http://www.rpsgb.org/informationresources/downloadsocietypublications/#r>

2. Design and methodology

The setting for this research was in Wales.

The focus groups were conducted within the Cardiff area and the postal questionnaire distributed across Wales.

Minor ailment conditions

This study aimed to investigate user preferences in selecting between general practitioners and community pharmacists in the management of minor ailment conditions. Rather than focusing on specific minor ailments, users were asked in the research to consider what factors would influence their choices generally in their

decision to visit either general practices or community pharmacies. This was believed to best reflect usual practice and the actual decision making context routinely faced by users. Further, it was considered to be the most pertinent scenario for policy makers seeking to understand user choices in this area i.e. considering user choices between general practices and community pharmacies in the management of undifferentiated minor ailments.

Study design

A two-stage, mixed methods approach was adopted, utilising both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Focus group methods were used to assist in the design of research instruments, followed by a discrete choice experiment conducted via a postal questionnaire.

3. The study was commissioned by the Pharmacy Practice Research Trust with a grant from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Gt Britain.

4. The Pharmacy Practice Research Trust

The Pharmacy Practice Trust was established in July 1999 as an independent research charity with a broad objective to promote and develop the field of pharmacy practice research. Its trustees are drawn from senior health policy makers, leading academics, industrialists and retailers. For further information email: practiceresearch@rpsgb.org