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'Think Pharmacy First' plea from hospital chief

A campaign to encourage local people to take advantage of free, expert health advice from their local pharmacy and help ease pressure on hospital services this winter is being backed by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust.

Think Pharmacy First is aimed at encouraging people to get advice and medicines to treat common or less serious illnesses, such as coughs, colds, upset stomachs and skin problems, simply by going to a community pharmacy.

Trust Chief Executive Steve Williamson said: "During the winter months, demand for NHS services traditionally increases and each year we put plans in place to deal with this. Last winter, however, hospitals throughout the country, including South Tyneside District Hospital, experienced unprecedented, sustained, heavy demand on emergency services over a number of months.

"A&E departments are for patients whose condition is critical or life-threatening and, as we approach another winter, we would like to appeal to the public to help our staff to do their job by choosing the right NHS service. For ailments such as coughs and colds, upset stomachs and general aches and pains, patients should Think Pharmacy First. Pharmacists are highly trained and fully qualified to give health advice on such issues to enable people to self-care.

By asking their local pharmacist for advice and staying at home and treating themselves with painkillers, rest and plenty of fluids, they will also help to reduce the spread of viruses to vulnerable patients in NHS waiting rooms and will leave appointments available for those with serious health conditions who need to see a doctor or nurse this winter."

Think Pharmacy First has been developed by NHS South Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), which worked closely with Gateshead and South Tyneside Local Pharmaceutical Committee.

Dr Matthew Walmsley, Chair of NHS South Tyneside CCG, said: "With NHS services across the country under pressure from increasing demand, it's more important than ever to choose the right service for your needs. Most patients use the NHS sensibly but a significant minority still go to A&E for problems that could be better dealt with by a pharmacist or a GP."

Local pharmacists can provide consultations on many common health problems. If you don't pay for prescriptions, you may be able to get free over the counter medicines with Think



Pharmacy First. For those who do pay for prescriptions, it is likely that buying medicines from a pharmacy will be less expensive than the prescription charge.

There are 39 pharmacies in South Tyneside, with 17 open on Saturdays and three offering evening opening and Sunday daytime opening (visit www.nhs.uk for details). Consultations with pharmacists are completely confidential and most pharmacies can offer a private area to talk about symptoms. If your condition is more serious, the pharmacist will be able to refer you to the right NHS service for your needs. Anyone worried about a child can discuss the problem with the pharmacist even if the child is not present.

To find your nearest pharmacy, or for more information about Think Pharmacy First, visit: www.southtynesideccg.nhs.uk/thinkpharmacyfirst
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Pictured above: Steve Williamson, South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's Chief Executive

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

For press enquiries on this release, contact 0191 404 1128 or email kay.jordan@stft.nhs.uk