

Pharmacist urges public to turn to pharmacies as NHS winter pressures mount

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Ahsan Bhatti, Superintendent Pharmacist at licensed online pharmacy Quick Meds and owner of Frankley Pharmacy in Birmingham, explains why your local pharmacy could be your first port of call for common health concerns this winter.

As winter approaches, the familiar NHS winter pressures are starting to make headlines again. Seasonal viruses, respiratory infections and other cold-weather illnesses can put extra strain on GP surgeries, urgent care services and A&E departments.

For patients, that can mean another winter of trying to get an appointment when they need medical advice or treatment, but there's another option that many people still overlook: their local pharmacy.

Many people still think of pharmacists as simply the people who dispense GP-issued prescriptions, but our role has grown considerably over the years. Today, qualified pharmacists can offer advice, assess a range of common conditions and, where appropriately trained and authorised, prescribe treatment.

That's especially useful when getting seen quickly by your local GP proves difficult. Last winter, it was reported that an additional 300,000 patients waited for a month to see a GP compared with the previous year - so knowing when your pharmacist can help could help you get treated much sooner.

Part of the problem is the lack of awareness of the types of issues a pharmacist can help with. We typically see and treat patients with common problems such as colds, sore throats, sinus problems, migraines, cystitis, thrush, bacterial vaginosis (BV), urinary tract infections (UTIs), acne, rosacea and impetigo, as well as lifestyle issues like hair loss, erectile dysfunction (ED) and weight management.

If you're suffering with any of these issues, you might typically head straight to your GP. But depending on your symptoms, medical history and the treatment needed, Pharmacist Independent Prescribers can prescribe any licensed medicine within their scope of clinical competence, including antibiotics.

You don't necessarily have to visit a pharmacy in person, either. Licensed online pharmacies in the UK who are registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council can offer consultations with qualified clinicians, including senior prescribing pharmacists, allowing patients to seek advice and treatment remotely through an established clinical process.

These services are especially important for people juggling work, caring responsibilities or difficulties getting out of the house.

Winter is one of the toughest times of year for the NHS, but by turning to pharmacies for non-urgent conditions, patients may be able to access the advice and treatment they need while helping to ensure GP appointments are available for those who need them most.

For more information, visit www.quickmeds.co.uk

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