Working together for better health
The NHS – is your NHS, use it well and it will serve you better.

The NHS belongs to all of us. It is a limited resource and there are things that we can all do for ourselves and for one another to help the NHS work effectively, and to ensure resources are used responsibly. In the spirit of working together toward a common goal, we all have a role to play as partners in our own healthcare, ensuring that we receive high quality care.

Through this resource the BMA PLG (patient liaison group) is working to improve patients’ understanding of their role in this process.
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The NHS: facts and figures

Each month, **23 million people visit their GP or practice nurse.**

**NHS 111** is a 24-hour telephone service that gives immediate care and advice to those who need it. It receives around a million calls a month or 36,000 a day in England.

Full-time **GPs treat an average of 255 patients a week.**

Ninety-five per cent of **patients in emergency departments** are being seen within four hours, despite an increase in the number of patients year on year.

In a typical week, **1.4 million people will receive help in their home from the NHS.**

**NHS ambulances make over 50,000 emergency journeys each week.**

Around **1.3 million people** — or the combined populations of Birmingham and Coventry — work for the NHS, which is one of the world’s biggest employers.

Approximately **170,000 people** (the capacity of the Glastonbury music festival) go for an eyesight test each week.

In 2013-14 **3,724 patients had their sight restored following a cornea transplant.**

In 2013-14 **more than 3,500 people’s lives were transformed by an organ transplant.**

In 2013-14 **more than 1.5 million patients and their families** every day.
Your NHS: how you can get involved

Doctors want your feedback
— both positive and negative — about the treatment and care you have received, including any side-effects you may have had. Providing your doctor with feedback allows them to determine if a treatment is helping you.

How do you report side-effects from medication?
The Yellow Card Scheme is the UK system for collecting information on suspected ADRs (adverse drug reactions) and side-effects to medicines and is vital in helping the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) monitor the safety of the medicines and vaccines that are on the market.

How to raise concerns about your care
Visit the BMA website for information on what you can do if you have concerns about the treatment that you or your family have received, whether on the NHS or privately.

How can you give back?
— Every year around 1,000 people die waiting for an organ transplant
— Did you know that only 4 per cent of people regularly give blood and only 26 per cent of us are on the NHS organ donor register?
— To find out more visit the NHS Choices website: Donation: the facts.

Find out more about the BMA’s position on organ donation here.

Have your say
Individuals and community groups can join their local Healthwatch to ensure that their worries and concerns about current services are addressed.

PALS (the Patient Advice and Liaison Service) offers confidential advice, support and information on health-related matters to patients, their families and carers.
Your NHS: it’s unique – help it help you

Keep NHS staff informed
If you give staff full information about your condition, including permanent disabilities, past medical conditions and details of any medicines you are taking, they can ensure you receive the best possible treatment in the safest possible way.

You should tell healthcare staff about any allergies or sensitivities you may have so that they can make sure you are treated safely.

Do you have the right to refuse treatment?
You have the right to accept or decline all medical care and treatment, from operations and injections to help with getting dressed.

Provided that a person is competent (that is they understand what is going on and the consequences of their actions) and that they are acting voluntarily, their decision about physical intervention cannot be overruled or ignored.

But do consider the consequences of such decisions – what might this mean for your health?
Discuss your options with your doctor.

Be patient
Do try to understand that there are pressures and limitations on the health service and those working within it.

Long waits are frustrating ...
... but they are sometimes unavoidable because of an individual patient’s needs.

You can do your bit to make the system run as smoothly as possible by being on time for your appointment.
Missed appointments
Did you know that missed appointments cost the NHS £600 million per year? That is enough to run two medium-sized hospitals.

While sometimes there are good reasons why people do not turn up for their appointments, two out of five missed appointments happen because patients simply forget. Many patients also fail to attend because they no longer require an appointment, but have not let the hospital or GP practice know.

Around one in 12 patients – that is 37,000 people a year – do not turn up for their hospital appointment. This adds up to around £500,000 of wasted resources.

This is the same cost as:
– 15 nurses or therapists
– Nearly 3,000 MRI scans
– 40 patient clinics.

Accessing the NHS easily
If English is not your first language you can contact the NHS Choices Interpreter Service, which can provide an interpreter to help you with your query. If you have a hearing or sight impairment please let NHS staff know in advance so arrangements can be made to accommodate you.

The NHS makes every effort to ensure that all staff are aware of the special needs of individual patients. All staff, however, rely on patients and carers to let them know how they can be best supported.

NHS staff learn a lot from patients and carers, so please tell staff how you want to be communicated with and what equipment you require to assist you during your stay at the hospital or visit to a GP surgery.

NHS disabled access
For information on disabled access please contact the hospital or GP practice directly or visit Disabled Go at: www.disabledgo.com

Keep your contact details up to date
Remember to inform NHS staff of any change in your contact details so they can keep your records up to date and can contact you if necessary.
Your NHS: take care with medicines

Unused prescription medicines cost the NHS across the UK over £300 million every year; £300 million could pay for:
- 80,906 more hip replacements*
- 101,351 more knee replacements*
- 19,799 more drug treatment courses for breast cancer*
- 11,778 more community nurses*
- 300,000 more drug treatment courses for Alzheimer’s disease*

* Based on average costs
Source: [www.medicinewaste.com](http://www.medicinewaste.com)

Did you know?

**Unused medicines cannot be recycled**
Even if you never open them, once medicines have left the pharmacy or dispensary they cannot be recycled or used by anyone else. Please take your unused medicines to the pharmacy or dispensary for safe disposal.

**Unused medicines are a safety risk**
If your medication changes, return your old medicines to the pharmacy for safe disposal to avoid mixing them up with your new medicines. Do not store unused medicines — it is a safety risk for children and other vulnerable people.

It is dangerous to dispose of your unused or unwanted medicines down the toilet.

For more information on this subject why not access the BMA’s briefing paper on [dispensed but unopened medicines](http://www.bma.org.uk/publications)?
Your NHS: take care with medicines

Medicine use review: understand your medicines
Have you ever wanted to find out more about your medicine? For example, you might want to know:

- what does the medicine do?
- for how long will I need to take it?
- when is the best time to take it?
- what are the possible side-effects?
- is it available in a container that is easy to open?

If you would like answers to any of these questions, you can arrange to see your local pharmacist for a free medicine use review.

Medicines are the most common cause of accidental poisoning in children. Remember to store medicines safely and out of reach of children.

If you won’t take it, don’t tick it! Only order the medicines you need

- You do not have to reorder everything on a repeat prescription slip at the same time. If you do not need a particular medicine at the moment, you can request it at a later date
- If you don’t understand the system of ordering repeat medication, speak to staff at your GP surgery
- If a relative, carer or community pharmacy orders medicines on your behalf, make sure you talk to them about exactly what you need.

Taking medicines

- You should take any medicine the doctor prescribes as instructed and ensure you finish the course of treatment. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before you decide to change or stop treatment
- If you do not follow the medical advice given to you, it can affect your treatment and recovery
- Taking medicine that is out of date or prescribed for someone else can be dangerous
- It is important to order your repeat prescriptions in plenty of time to ensure you do not run out of medication
- Your GP or pharmacist wants to help — why not discuss your medication with them
- If you need to go into hospital, please remember to take all your medicines with you in a clearly marked bag.

Why not check which medicines you have at home before ordering more — remember that your medicines may come in different packaging and that the tablet size and shape may change from one order to the next. This is because the pharmacist may order from a different supplier.
Your NHS: your role in infection control

What can you do to help stop the spread of infection?
- Keep vulnerable people safe from infection. If you have a cold or diarrhoea, or if you feel unwell, wait until you are better before visiting relatives or friends in hospital or a care home.
- Do wash and dry your hands before you visit a hospital or care home, particularly after going to the toilet. If there is alcohol hand gel provided (usually at the ward door or at the bedside) then please use it.
- Ask staff for advice before you bring in food, drink or flowers for someone you are visiting in hospital or a care home. When you visit do not sit on their bed or bring too many visitors at once.
- Never touch dressings, drips or other equipment around the bed.
- Do let a member of staff know if you think NHS premises or a care home are not as clean as they should be. If you think a health or social care worker has forgotten to wash their hands, please remind them — it is OK to do so.

Coughs and sneezes spread diseases

THINK FIRST

We can all do our bit to stop disease from spreading.

Some diseases, such as flu, are infectious — they spread from person to person through the air or through direct or indirect contact.
Your NHS: treat it well

When booking an appointment
If you let the receptionist know the reason for your appointment they can ensure you see the right health professional and allow the correct length of appointment time. Anything that is discussed with the receptionists or any other member of the team is treated in strict confidence.

NHS staff will respect your right to privacy and confidentiality. All the personal information about you and details of treatment you receive from healthcare organisations is confidential.

Remember your appointment
– If you are late for your appointment or do not show up at all it affects other patients and in some cases can lead to other patients not being seen
– If you cannot attend do give enough notice so someone else can have your appointment
– If we all do this it will save money, reduce waiting times and make it more likely that when you need an appointment one will be available.

Why not put a reminder in your phone?
Missing an appointment could mean missing out on important medical treatment. If healthcare staff are coming to visit you at home, make sure you are home at the agreed time.
Your NHS: valuing our staff

Violence against staff includes verbal abuse and threats, as well as physical assaults. Violence could lead to:
- you being removed from healthcare premises
- information about your behaviour being passed to other healthcare providers
- information about you being passed to the police.

The NHS will not accept racial, sexual or any other kind of harassment or abuse against staff or patients.

‘I was attacked with a syringe by a patient and suffered nerve damage. I had to be off work for six months.’

Did you know that since the implementation of the zero-tolerance policy in 1999, patients can be and have been prosecuted for abusing NHS staff?

During 2012 to 2013, there were 1,458 prosecutions and patients can be fined up to £1,000 for abusing NHS staff.

You should be greeted and treated with kindness by all NHS staff ... in return please treat all staff and other patients with kindness.

We want to help
The National Audit Office estimates that violence against NHS staff costs £69 million per year. In 2013, 63,199 NHS staff were attacked by patients who they were trying to help.

We are here to help
If there is anything you do not understand about your condition or treatment, let the doctor know and they will explain it to you. If they use medical terms that you do not understand, ask them to explain them to you.

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Updated January 2015