

Letter to the editor of *The Times*

March 16, 2010

Sir

A report published today by our advocacy group for self care, the *Self Care Campaign*, presents the results of research that reveal the catastrophic impact of the public's dependency on the NHS and that the NHS has become the victim of a demand-led culture. Seeing a GP for ailments that can be self-treated is estimated to cost an astonishing £2bn every year. With the NHS Confederation forecasting a shortfall in NHS funding of £20bn over the next five years, a shift in behaviour around treating minor ailments could save the NHS £10bn during that time without any cuts to services whatsoever.

We are now a society in which the common disturbances to normal good health, such as coughs and colds, are accounting for nearly one fifth of GP workload. There are 51.4m consultations annually for minor ailments alone, a testament to an NHS addressing demand rather than need, the founding principle of the service. A 21<sup>st</sup> century national health service must be sustainable and have the resource to deal with consultations in primary care that meet the complex needs of people with long term conditions and co-morbidities.

We are therefore issuing a manifesto that calls on all political parties to support our campaign at individual, local and national level and to:

- allow people to be confident in their self care choices
- enable healthcare professionals, especially a GP and practice nurse, to offer support in making people feel confident enough to use the NHS at the point of need, not demand
- introduce a social marketing campaign to educate people to understand and manage minor ailments with the right information so that GPs' and practice nurses' time is freed up to look after more complex conditions
- ensure children are educated through the national curriculum to understand health issues and how to use the NHS effectively and appropriately.

Yours faithfully

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Peter Baker, Men's Health Forum

Dr John Chisholm CBE, GP

Dr Michael Dixon OBE, NHS Alliance, GP

Dr Simon Fradd, GP

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