# **PRESS RELEASE**

***\*\*Under embargo until 00:01 on Wednesday 18 October 2023\*\****

**Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin residents urged to**

**‘Think Which Service’ this winter**

Health and care leaders are calling on residents across Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin to help stretched A&E and GP surgeries this winter by re-thinking which service they opt for when unwell.

Launched today (Wednesday 18 October), the *Think Which Service* campaign urges local people to ‘Think Self-Care’ and to consider using services such as their local pharmacy, Minor Injury Unit (MIU) or NHS 111, before turning straight to their GP, nearest A&E or dialling 999.

In Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin each year, more than 130,000 people turn up at A&E departments. While many of these patients require care from A&E staff, more than two thirds (63%) of A&E attendances last year could have been effectively treated elsewhere in the system, such as in an MIU or by a pharmacist.

But, despite the well-documented pressures on health services, research carried out by NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin has highlighted gaps in the public’s knowledge and general awareness of which services to use when they require urgent advice or treatment.

When asked about community pharmacists, just 26% of survey respondents knew they could count on them for urgent care, highlighting a need to champion how they can advise and treat people.

But, when asked about A&E usage, 50% of participants said it would be either their first choice or a ‘key consideration’ for urgent care.

Now, local GPs, pharmacists and nurses have come together to help raise awareness of which services are available and, importantly, when to use each one, as part of the *Think Which Service* initiative.

As part of the *Think Which Service* campaign, NHS leaders want to highlight the expertise that pharmacists can provide, offering help and over-the-counter medicines for conditions such as sore throats, aches and pains, coughs, colds and flu, COVID-19 and flu vaccinations plus advice on healthy living such as how to eat better, lose weight and stop smoking.

Dr Melanie Thompson, a GP at Woodside Medical Practice in Telford, said: “Naturally, the winter months are when we see spikes in colds, flu and even sickness bugs. For some, an automatic reaction when feeling unwell would be to book an appointment with their GP; however, many people don’t realise that their local community pharmacists are highly qualified and knowledgeable and can offer the same or very similar advice and treatment.

“Additionally, clinical pharmacists in GP practices work as part of our team. They can provide medication reviews; help manage long-term conditions and advise people who have complex needs and are on multiple medicines. Some practices may have skilled Advanced Clinical Practitioners, and Nurse Practitioners, also able to assist.

“We want to ensure that we can focus on diagnosing and treating those patients who need our expertise, so we are urging local people to think about which service they may need before immediately choosing their GP and, potentially, preventing someone else from getting the care they need.”

The *Think Which Service* campaign shines a spotlight on when to attend an MIU rather than an A&E. MIUs are staffed by experienced emergency care nurses and are a fast and effective way of getting urgent treatment without the long wait in A&E.

And, in a further effort to reduce pressures on A&E, residents are also being asked to visit NHS 111 online or call 111 if they require urgent help that isn’t life-threatening. NHS 111 can direct people to the right service and advice 24/7, 365 days a year.

Alison Bussey, Chief Nursing Officer at NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, said: “In our area, we have some of the most stretched A&E departments in the country, impacting on waiting times and ambulance delays.

“The *Think Which Service* campaign aims to encourage people to self-care to help them stay physically and mentally well and highlights the various services available to our residents so they can consider if there is another way to get the treatment or advice they need.

“Of course, if it is an emergency then you should absolutely head to A&E or dial 999 but, unfortunately, we are seeing a high number of people turning up with illnesses or injuries that could be treated in a minor injury unit, by a pharmacist or, in some cases, with self-care at home.

“We are calling on local people to get behind our campaign and try to *‘think which service’* this winter to help alleviate pressures on our NHS workers.”

For further information about Think Which Service, visit: <http://thinkwhichservice.co.uk/>

**-ENDS-**

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**Notes to editor**

* Wait times at our A&E departments are amongst the worst in the country.  In August, our A&E departments were the worst in the country at dealing with patients within the government's four hour target to be admitted, transferred or discharged.  Last winter, we also saw some of the worst ambulance handover delays in the country.
* The most common reasons that someone attended A&E in Shropshire in the last year were:
	+ Soft tissue injuries, such as sprains, cuts and sprains
	+ Infectious Disease
	+ Cardiovascular
	+ Fracture/dislocation
* Many of these patients will need to be at A&E.  For example, cardiovascular patients, 81% are classed as ‘urgent’ or ‘very urgent’.  However, for soft tissue injuries, only 34% are ‘urgent’ or ‘very urgent’.  Many of the rest should have been seen at an MIU, pharmacy or GP instead.
* Patients who get characterised as ‘Very Urgent’ (effectively those who definitely should be at A&E), had chief symptoms of circulation/chest, trouble breathing, gastrointestinal, neurological, and serious injuries.