

## Nurses hold the key to self-care success by supporting patients

Nurses are vital in delivering the government's commitment to supporting self-care, says chief nursing officer for England **Dame Christine Beasley**

Some 15.4 million patients in England live with a long-term condition and numbers are expected to rise to 18 million by 2025. How the NHS copes with this increase poses a significant challenge for us all. In fact, many of you are probably dealing with the issues it raises every day.

Providing high-quality care for people with long-term conditions is a well-known health priority with senior political support. In January 2008, prime minister Gordon Brown committed to improving the lives of patients with long-term conditions, pledging better support to enable them to take a more active role in decisions about their care. Lord Darzi reinforced this message in his NHS Next Stage Review.

Supporting patients to self-care is integral to successfully delivering this commitment, and this is a direct response to what we know patients want. Recent market research by Ipsos Mori showed two-thirds of

those surveyed had approached their GP, practice nurse or pharmacist in the previous six months, seeking self-care advice.

To help patients understand what help is available, the Department of Health developed *Your Health, Your Way* ([www.nhs.uk/yourhealth](http://www.nhs.uk/yourhealth)), previously known as the Patient's Prospectus, which aims to help the public access information about self-care support.

Many of you already give patients support to help them live their lives to the full. I recognise nurses themselves need help and support to spread the ethos of supported self-care to a range of patients.

In April, the DH (2009) launched a booklet, designed to help nurses integrate self-care support and care planning into practice. It was developed with nurses to be useful for your needs, and sets out the approach and benefits of supporting people to self-care. It also outlines the five areas of self-care support (see Changing Practice, p14).

The booklet is accompanied by an online practical guide to other information sources. These resources are the first step in making nurses 'armed and ready' to help patients who want to do more to self-care, as well as encourage those who might not yet feel so confident. Information prescriptions (see [www.nhs.uk/yourhealth](http://www.nhs.uk/yourhealth)) have also been developed for 19 conditions.

Essentially, *Your Health, Your Way* is about shared responsibility, supporting decision-making and starting conversations. Well-informed patients should not be viewed as a threat, but as experts in their own condition.

If we support self-care – making it a success and a vital part of patients' daily life – the benefits will be considerable. The more supported people are, the more they will manage their own condition and stay well for longer. Patients will have greater control, which means

more confidence and better overall health. This will become even more important, following the government commitment to offer every patient with a long-term condition a care plan by 2010.

In addition, the NHS will see a reduction in admissions, freeing up of beds and GP and nurse time will be spent more effectively. Nurses will be able to see marked improvements in patients' conditions by helping them to help themselves; no one could deny the job satisfaction in that.

I believe that with support from the DH, focus from PCTs, and working with GPs, allied health professionals and individual patients, nurses will be a driving force in unlocking the potential of people who choose to self-care. ●

### REFERENCE

Department of Health (2009) *Your Health, Your Way – A Guide to Long-Term Conditions and Self-Care*. London: DH. [tinyurl.com/your-health-your-way](http://tinyurl.com/your-health-your-way)

**'Nurses will be a driving force in unlocking the potential of people who choose to self-care'**

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