

Ask About Medicines Week 2003: *evaluation briefing*

This briefing paper summarises the findings of the evaluation exercises carried out for the Ask About Medicines Week Executive, and looks in particular at the lessons we have learned for future initiatives.

The first Ask About Medicines Week ran from 12 to 18 October 2003. Its aim was to lay the foundation for lasting change by:

- Giving people opportunities to ask questions about medicines and encouraging better communication between health professionals and people taking medicine
- Influencing expectations so that asking questions about medicines becomes the norm
- Acting as a catalyst to improve the depth and quality of medicines information.

The campaign was timely and relevant because medicines play a key role in maintaining good health but are not always used to best effect.

- Up to 50% of medicines for long-term conditions are not taken as prescribed^{1,2}
- As many as 1 in 5 people choose not to take the first step of collecting a prescription from the pharmacy¹
- 30 – 45% of people don't pick up repeat prescriptions¹
- Many people on short-term medication depart from recommended doses within a day or two of starting treatment¹
- People's own views and beliefs about medicines are a key influence on whether, when and how they take their medicines³.



AAMW 2003 provided focus, support and encouragement for **a wide range of local initiatives**

Ask About Medicines Week 2003 demonstrated the value of a major cross-sectoral campaign to improve the use of medicines

- It attracted broad support from voluntary health organisations, PCTs, pharmacists, professional bodies, government and the pharmaceutical industry
- It provided focus, support and encouragement for a huge range of local initiatives
- It produced useful tools to support patients, carers and health care professionals, including:
 - Ask About Medicines Question Card, sponsored by the National Patient Safety Agency
 - Health and Medicines Information Guide and Directory, sponsored by the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry
 - New forms of medicines information for patients and the public in epilepsy and colds and flu, providing a template for rolling out to all conditions and medicines
- It enabled PCTs to make progress towards meeting their own medicines management goals.

There was broad and deep commitment to Ask About Medicines Week. 399 partners signed up to support the campaign

- 150 PCTs
- 100 pharmacy organisations
- 100 voluntary health organisations
- A wide range of professional bodies and private sector organisations interested in health care.

This compares well with the 284 partners that signed up to support the first National Men's Health Week.

A wide range of local and regional activities was stimulated by Ask About Medicines Week, for example:

- PCTs ran local media campaigns, question sessions in residential homes and lunch clubs, medicines awareness days at day centres, and targeted consumers in shopping centres and railway stations
- Hospitals briefed and recruited pharmacists, nurses, doctors and play leaders to lead activities, staff stands and answer questions about medicines.

The Welsh Assembly adopted the campaign with enthusiasm, building a strong coalition of stakeholders to generate activities, events and media awareness throughout Wales.

Media coverage targeted health professionals and provided 27 million opportunities for members of the public to hear or read campaign messages

- National stories were carried in the *Times* and the *Sun*
- There was extensive coverage in the regional press
- The *British Medical Journal* and the *Pharmaceutical Journal* ran theme issues during the Week, and there was excellent coverage in the nursing press
- There were 13 hours of regional radio coverage on 25 local radio stations
- Many PCTs chose to focus on messages about medicines waste.

Higher national media profile could have been achieved by adopting more controversial messages. A decision was made to concentrate on the core 'ask about your medicines' message which lacked appeal to the national media but worked well with the regional press.

There was broad and deep commitment

399 partners signed up to support the campaign

A formal evaluation of the Ask About Medicines Question Card found that 80% of people found it potentially valuable⁴

- Over 3m cards were distributed through community and hospital pharmacy and PCTs
- 73% of people said that they would use the card in the future⁴
- Pharmacists' responses to the card were mixed, with some scepticism about the likely impact of the card alone. Whilst the questions were considered of value, there are practical issues that need to be resolved in order to support the use of the card in community pharmacies⁴.

New sources of medicines information for the public were created as part of Ask About Medicines Week

- NHS Direct Online (NHSDO) developed and improved its treatment and medicines information for the Week
- A cross-sectoral Medicines Information Project Advisory Board oversaw the creation of pilot electronic Medicines Guides for epilepsy, linked to NHSDO, which will now be rolled out to other therapy areas
- Links between NHSDO and Medicine Chest Online were established for medicines available over the counter in pharmacies
- Health & Medicines Information Guide and Directory, which was distributed via general practices.

80% found the Ask About Medicines Question Card potentially valuable

Awareness of Ask About Medicines Week was high for a first year campaign

- In a MORI survey of members of the public, there was 15% awareness that a health campaign about medicines had taken place in the last few weeks⁵
- 3% specifically recognised the Ask About Medicines brand⁵
- This compares to 15% name awareness of National Medicines Week in Australia, after it had been running for three years.

The size and scope of the campaign placed considerable strain on very limited central resources

- Achieving distribution of the card across community pharmacy was an enormous task in itself
- The tight budget meant that we were unable to distribute the cards more widely. We also had limited resources to support partners and respond to local needs
- At times our people, processes and systems were stretched to the limit.

There is strong support for building on Ask About Medicines Week in 2004 and beyond. Stakeholders recognise that:

- Ask About Medicines Week 2003 was the first step on a journey towards long term cultural change
- Its goals are consistent with key policies on patient choice, safety and self-care
- There is a need to reinforce messages to achieve behavioural change by medicine takers and health professionals
- There is a strong base of support and success on which to build future campaigns.

“The objectives of AAMW fit with a lot of our objectives” *voluntary organisation*

Mission and objectives

Ask About Medicines Week aims to achieve lasting change by encouraging better communication between people and their health professionals, improving the depth and quality of medicines information, and changing expectations so that asking questions about medicines becomes the norm.

The Ask About Medicines Week objectives were to enable people in the UK to make informed choices about medicine taking by:

- increasing people’s understanding of their medicines
- helping patients to be involved in decisions about their treatment
- creating more opportunities to ask questions and raise concerns about medicines
- encouraging health professionals to help patients to ask questions about medicines
- improving access to further sources of helpful, reliable medicines and information.

A structured evaluation

Undertaking an evaluation and reporting highlights of the 2003 event is a critical step for all those involved to understand the current situation, critically assess what has been achieved to date and inform the development of future activities.

This evaluation briefing summarises the results of the 2003 event and highlights the key learnings for the future. The messages in the briefing are informed by a number of separate feedback and evaluation exercises undertaken during and after the Week. These included: the extent to which messages were communicated via the media; structured feedback from key stakeholders; surveys of participating PCTs and hospitals; formal evaluation of the Question Card carried out by the Picker Institute and measurement of public awareness of the event by MORI.

The full results of all the individual evaluations are available on request from Ask About Medicines Week by emailing info@askaboutmedicines.org.

Why Ask About Medicines Week is important

Medicines, both prescription medicines and those bought over the counter from pharmacies, play a significant part in most of our lives and are increasingly important as a way of enabling people to maintain good health and quality of life. Extensive research shows that many people choose not to take their medicines as prescribed². The evidence suggests that this is often because they are struggling with unpleasant side effects, are unclear about the benefits of treatment and/or have concerns about their medicine that have not been addressed. Ask About Medicines Week aims to encourage people to find out about medicines so that they are in a better position to make safe and informed choices. This may include the choice not to take prescribed medicine.

Current health policy places increasing emphasis on patient choice and self-care as a route to greater satisfaction with health services, more effective use of resources, and better long term outcomes and quality of life. Ask About Medicines has the potential to make a real contribution to those objectives.

Learning for the future: AAMW 2004 communications must show clearly how campaign objectives support current health policy and contribute towards a more inclusive and equitable approach to health, promoting self-care and increased choice for everyone.

“The concept behind AAMW is **spot on**”

anon

Who was involved with Ask About Medicines Week

The event was organised by an Executive group made up of Developing Patient Partnerships (Formerly Doctor Patient Partnership, DPP), the Task Force on Medicines Partnership, the PECMI working group, and one private individual (Melinda Letts). The Executive was supported by an Advisory Group of key stakeholders covering medicine, pharmacy, nursing, industry and voluntary health organisations. 399 partner organisations signed up in support of AAMW.

Learning for the future: AAMW is highly relevant to the agendas of PCTs, voluntary health organisations, health professionals and industry as they work towards their own respective goals. In 2004 AAMW activities must be clearly aligned to the priorities of our partners and materials need to be available to all partners.

The audience

The audience for Ask About Medicines Week included all people and organisations with an interest in prescribing and medicines taking. The challenge was to communicate with such a diverse audience, meeting their needs and providing information that was relevant to their individual interests.

- General public – all people who take medicines, may take medicines in the future or who are involved in helping others with their medicines
- Community and hospital pharmacists
- Primary Care Trusts
- GPs and hospital doctors
- Professional organisations / Royal Colleges
- Nurses
- Voluntary health organisations
- Pharmaceutical industry.

“**AAMW is a very real example** of what we mean about **working in partnership** and provides an example that people can understand” *Department of Health*

“The work with the professional press was good **and very successful**”

Department of Health

Media

A comprehensive media campaign was developed and implemented to raise awareness of AAMW amongst the public and health professionals. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists were made aware of the Week through their professional media and encouraged to discuss medicines with their patients to improve patient satisfaction and treatment outcomes. Targeted media briefings were held for the pharmacy, nursing and medical press, in partnership with the relevant stakeholders: the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, the Chief Nursing Officer at the Department of Health, and the Royal College of General Practitioners. PR and media support were provided by Ruder Finn.

Using data from MORI surveys and building on a number of themes, coverage was secured in the national, regional and local consumer print and broadcast media. In total the media coverage gave 27 million opportunities for people to read or hear about AAMW messages regarding the taking of medicines. Local and regional media, including local radio, were particularly successful. Higher national coverage could have been achieved with more contentious messages, particularly around safety and waste. The Ask About Medicines Week Executive had decided early on, however, that this approach would risk generating adverse publicity and anxiety for patients and should be avoided.

Learning for the future: AAM campaigns must strengthen the ability of partners to capitalise on local communication opportunities, with focussed messages targeted at all audiences and a range of good case studies. Decisions on national messages need to be made early and stakeholder expectations managed in line with realistic expectations of national media coverage.

Activities and outputs

Surveys: to find out how people regard medicines and information about medicines, a survey of over 2,000 adults in Great Britain was conducted by MORI. A separate MORI poll was conducted among GPs, pharmacists and practice nurses. These baseline data will enable changes in attitude and behaviour to be tracked in future years and will help in the development of future campaigns. The results of these surveys were used in the media campaign and to support all communication activities.

Top line findings from the surveys include:

- 55% of people prescribed a new medicine in the last twelve months felt that they did not know enough about other possible medicines or treatments
- Almost one in three people who have been prescribed a medicine in the last year felt they did not know enough about the potential side effects of medicines
- Six out of ten people said that the benefits of medicines outweighed the risks
- An overwhelming 81% said that it was valuable to have different types of information about medicines from different sources rather than one single source of medicines information
- The most useful source of information was perceived to be advice from health professionals
- Over half of the GPs, practice nurses and pharmacists surveyed believe that most patients want to be treated as partners in decisions about medicine taking. Only one in seven doctors said that patients would want the prescriber to decide for them.

Learning for the future: Research evidence about patients' and professionals' attitudes to and experience of informed choice in medicine taking is important to underpin media campaigns, develop relevant programmes and track progress against our overall objectives.

“I think this card is an excellent idea. From my personal point of view it is very important that you know all you need to about your medication” *patient*

Ask About Medicines Question Card: developed in partnership with the National Patient Safety Agency, the Question Card was designed to help people ask about medicines that they were already taking or ones that they planned to take or were considering taking. A credit card sized tear-out card contained 5 key questions to stimulate dialogue between patient and health care professional about medicines. The card was piloted in local Age Concern offices.

3.1 million cards were printed and distributed via community pharmacies, hospital pharmacies and PCTs. Developing Patient Partnerships sponsored an additional 900,000 cards for distribution to PCTs on top of the original number provided by the NPSA. Cards were printed in 10 minority languages and Welsh as well as English. The cards were distributed to community pharmacy via the two major wholesalers. This inevitably resulted in a small proportion of duplication and gaps in coverage, which was frustrating for pharmacists in those areas.

The value of the card to patients and health care professionals was formally evaluated by the Picker Institute during the period immediately after AAMW. 80% of patients asked felt that the card was useful or very useful and 73% were planning to use the card in the future.

“The card is a good resource” *PCT*

“A lot of people said, ooh this is good, this will help me. Prompt me to ask the right sort of questions” *pharmacist*

Pharmacist responses to the card were more mixed. Some reported disappointment in the level of national media coverage for the campaign as a whole and only a few felt any real ownership of the initiative. The content and purpose of the card and its place in encouraging greater dialogue over medicine choices were acknowledged. However, feedback indicated that some improvements in the physical design and durability of the card would be of benefit. In addition, pharmacists commented that access to private areas would encourage patients to ask more questions; and changes in pharmacy working practices would free time to enable pharmacists to respond to their customer needs.

Learning for the future: The project needs to stimulate the more active engagement of pharmacists as well as input from patients.

“Our patient survey showed that patients felt they were not receiving enough information from their pharmacist. This campaign has raised awareness and will encourage patients to ask questions” *PCT*

“All materials I’ve seen have been **excellent**”

voluntary organisation

Partner and local activities: partner organisations were encouraged to participate in the campaign by running local events to meet local needs and priorities. In support of this, tailored local activity packs for pharmacists and PCTs were made available – they included posters, question cards and supporting information relating to AAMW key messages and media activity.

“An **unprecedented level of partnership**”

industry partner

Learning for the future: Enthusiasm and support at a local level needs to be harnessed by the timely provision of more resources that can underpin local collaboration and be tailored to meet local needs, within the framework of the overall campaign messages.

Health and Medicines Information Guide and Directory: Ask About Medicines Week developed this booklet in partnership with the Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry, to provide guidance to patients and the public on how to find health and medicines information and how to judge if it meets an individual’s needs.

The publication was printed and distributed to Primary Care Trusts and voluntary health organisations. The guide is available online at www.askaboutmedicines.org.

“Material should remain available **as we want to continue to use it throughout the year**”

PCT

“This is brilliant. Just what we need”

person with epilepsy

Medicines Information Pilot: a uniquely broad coalition of organisations was brought together to create new medicines information resources. Through a ground-breaking collaboration between the pharmaceutical industry and NHS Direct Online, under the guidance of a high-level Advisory Board, a new online information source was developed and the pilot launched during AAMW.

The pilot covered epilepsy and colds and flu. Information about medicines for epilepsy was provided in Medicines Guides, produced by Datapharm Communications, and NHS Direct Online. Information about individual colds and flu remedies was provided by Medicine Chest Online. The Medicines Information Project will be further developed to include other therapy areas and distribution channels during 2004.

Learning for the future: Collaboration is an effective way of producing new information resources for the general public and medicine users.

Support beyond England

Ask About Medicines Week was a campaign primarily developed for England. The AAMW Executive approached all three devolved administrations to discuss possible collaboration. Scotland and Northern Ireland both supported the principles of Ask About Medicines Week, but were unable to devote significant resources to implementing campaigns in 2003. The Welsh Assembly formed a coalition of stakeholders and was able to implement an extremely successful campaign securing high level political support and media coverage. The Welsh campaign was a powerful illustration of how leadership in a devolved administration enabled the central campaign to be harnessed and delivered effectively to build alliances and take forward a national agenda to improve medicines use.

Learning for the future: It is important to involve devolved administrations at an early stage to enable successful collaboration to meet shared objectives. The example of Wales has shown that, where stakeholders work together in a particular geography, this approach can be very effective. Central resources are needed to support the involvement of campaigns in other countries within the UK.

“It was worthwhile.

We would support and get involved with a future event”
voluntary organisation

Project management, planning and resources

This was the first Ask About Medicines Week, and it was unclear at the beginning how much interest would be generated and how big the demand for materials would become. With no initial full time staff, and with all financial resources having to be raised from partners and sponsors, planning was a constant challenge throughout the first eight months of the year. The campaign was led by an Executive of four people: Kristin McCarthy from Developing Patient Partnerships, Joanne Shaw from the Task Force on Medicines Partnership, David Dickinson of the PECMI working group and one individual (Melinda Letts). None of the Executive members was full time. DPP staff organised the initial concept launch in the House of Commons and provided ongoing administrative support for event management, finance, printing and distribution. A small project team consisting of a part time director and a full time co-ordinator was based at Medicines Partnership from June. Public relations and media support was provided by a team from Ruder Finn. The modest central resources meant that both time and money were stretched by the scale and scope of the campaign. The effect was that the ability to respond in a timely way to the needs of local partners was very limited.

The overall income for the campaign was £361,000 with 58% coming from NHS bodies and professional organisations and 42% from the pharmaceutical industry. The single biggest financial contributor was the National Patient Safety Agency, which sponsored the Question Card. Support in kind was provided by a range of organisations with an interest in health care. The list of financial and other contributors is given on the back cover.

Learning for the future: There is a need to plan for robust central infrastructure with enough human and financial resource to support partners and deliver outputs on a timely basis, to maximise overall impact and enable partners to be fully effective at a local level. This means ensuring that income generated for specific activities and outputs is sufficient to cover effective central management and co-ordination, through an explicit management fee.

“It felt a bit last minute in terms of preparation”
voluntary organisation

The theme for AAMW 2004 will be **making informed choices about medicines**

Plans for the future

The overall aim for 2004 is to make measurable progress towards enabling people to make safe and informed choices about medicines. We intend to develop and build upon the strategic alliances formed during 2003 in order to deliver a major national and local campaign from 1 to 6 November 2004.

In addition to generating sufficient income for AAMW 2004, there is also a requirement to encourage longer-term commitment from sponsors to AAM and to create the infrastructure necessary to support the work of the next five years.

The theme for Ask About Medicines Week 2004 will be **making informed choices about medicines**. In 2004 we plan, among other things, to:

- Consolidate and build upon the existing support for AAMW, by increasing the breadth and depth of relationships with partner organisations.
- Encourage different groups to work together at local level, in particular, PCTs, community and hospital pharmacy, voluntary health organisations and other local voluntary groups, especially in the field of social care
- Develop a consumer-orientated website with links to other medicines and health resources
- Provide central resources (Action Packs) online, tailored to different target audiences.
- Make the action packs available and promote awareness of the resources well in advance of the Week itself
- Produce a very selective range of resources (posters plus one other core product) for health professionals and distribute them primarily through PCTs and on a demand basis
- Work with NHS Direct so that a telephone helpline number can be promoted to the public for Ask About Medicines Week
- Make more electronic Medicines Guides available via the Medicines Information Project during the week and publicise their availability so that more people are able to make use of them
- Reissue the Health & Medicines Information Guide & Directory and distribute it more widely
- Commission relevant surveys to track changes in health professional and patient attitudes to and experience of informed choice in medicine taking
- Create media hooks to gain national coverage and generate interest and awareness among the general public
- Work with partners to encourage activities that enable disadvantaged groups such as people with learning difficulties and young people in care to make safe and informed choices about medicines.

Partners and potential partners who wish to discuss opportunities for participating in Ask About Medicines Week 2004 are invited, in the first instance, to email us on info@askaboutmedicines.org.

AAMW 1 to 6 November 2004

www.askaboutmedicines.org

info@askaboutmedicines.org

The organisations that made significant financial and other contributions to Ask About Medicines Week 2003 are:

Age Concern

Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry

Datapharm Communications

Department of Health

Developing Patient Partnerships (formerly the Doctor Patient Partnership)

Johnson & Johnson

Merck Sharp & Dohme

National Assembly for Wales

National Patient Safety Agency

National Pharmaceutical Association

NHS Direct Online

PECMI working group (promoting excellence in consumer medicines information)

Proprietary Association of Great Britain

Royal Pharmaceutical Society

Royal College of General Practitioners

Ruder Finn

Task Force on Medicines Partnership

References

1 *From Compliance to Concordance: Achieving Shared Goals in Medicine Taking*, Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, March 1997

2 *A Question of Choice*, Medicines Partnership, 2003

3 *Room for Review*, Medicines Partnership, 2002

4 *Evaluation of the Ask About Your Medicines Question Card*, Picker Institute Europe, January 2004

5 *Awareness of Ask About Medicines Week Omnibus*, MORI, 23 to 28 October 2003

Technical Note

MORI Social Research Institute interviewed a representative quota sample of 2,019 adults aged 15+ across 192 sampling points in Great Britain for 17 to 22 July 2003 on behalf of the Medicines Partnership. All interviews were conducted face-to-face, in-home and the data have been weighted to the known profile of the British population.

MORI also conducted research among GPs, pharmacists and practice nurses in GB for the Doctor Patient Partnership between 14 and 25 July 2003. 102 face-to-face interviews were conducted with GPs and telephone interviews were conducted with pharmacists and practice nurses (100 in each case). For further information, please contact Michele Corrado or Anna Carluccio at MORI on 0207 347 3000.