

URGENT PRIMARY CARE PATHFINDER

Fact Sheet 2

When 'Urgent' is not an Emergency



Context

Frequently 'emergency' and 'urgent care' are used interchangeably, with different perceptions of meaning. This can cause confusion with both care providers and the public. In addition, service users want a clearer sense of service priorities and clarity in what different services are for.

The concept of 'urgent care' is difficult to define. Much of the literature refers to urgent care in general, rather than specifically to urgent primary care.

This document highlights the constructs that are used in forming these definitions of urgent and emergency care, the lack of specificity around the terms, and the impact this may have to users.

Simple definition of urgent primary care and emergency care

Urgent primary care:

Health and wellbeing issues that may result in significant or permanent harm if not dealt within the next 8 hours.

Emergency care:

Health and wellbeing issues that may result in significant or permanent harm or death if not dealt with immediately.

The need for a clear definition

A clearer understanding of what constitutes urgent primary care is needed, and evidence has shown that service users want a clearer sense of service priorities and clarity in what services are for.

The University of Swansea was commissioned to undertake an academic literature review. Of 60,000 papers in this area, 170 addressed the definition of urgent care.

The focus of these papers identified four broad constructs used in forming their definitions:

- Physiological factors
- Relational language
- Health service characteristics
- Patients' perceived needs

In deliberations from both the national Urgent Primary Care Clinical Reference Group and the Implementation Board, value was noted in providing simple definitions to differentiate the terms.

The main constructs discussed involved the severity of the medical issues and the time frame that the issue must be dealt with.

The focus was on identifying what the four constructs meant and providing appropriate care to the patient to minimise any risk of significant or permanent harm.

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Expanded definition of urgent primary care

Health and wellbeing issues that may result in significant or permanent harm if not dealt within the next 8 hours.

Urgent primary care services include a phone consultation through same day /out-of-hours primary care appointments, the NHS111 Wales* (including the 111 Clinical Support Hub), pharmacy advice, and/or referral to an urgent primary care centre (UPCC).

*If unsure what service is needed, NHS111 Wales can help to assess and direct to the appropriate service/s.

Defining urgent primary care

The need for clarity informed the deliberations of the national pathfinder groups in refining the definitions of urgent primary care and emergency care.

To provide clear and purposeful definitions, value was seen in making them as simple as possible. The major construct around which the definitions were formed was the physiological aspects of urgent primary care and emergency care, particularly the severity of the illness or injury and how this relates to the timeframe in which the medical issue must be dealt with.

With regards to severity, it is regarded that emergency care should be reserved for the most serious cases where there is risk of significant or permanent harm or death if the issue is not dealt with immediately. With urgent primary care, there is still a risk of significant or permanent harm if not dealt with within a certain timeframe.

Based on the literature review undertaken by Swansea University and further discussions, draft simple definitions of urgent primary care and emergency care were developed.

The Task and Finish Group agreed these draft definitions to help shape the work of developing Urgent Primary Care Centres (UPCCs) and the definitions will be continually reviewed as the national model develops.

In addition, consideration was also given to expanding the definition of urgent primary care to include extra information regarding the other constructs, particularly with regards to the health service characteristics.

For further information please contact: SPPC@wales.nhs.uk

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