

Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Thursday 5th July, 2012



NHS 111 in Oxfordshire

1. Introduction

The NHS 111 service is being introduced to make it easier for the public to access healthcare services when they need medical help fast, but it is not a life-threatening situation. The NHS 111 service is part of the wider revisions to the urgent care system to deliver a 24/7 urgent care service that ensures people receive the right care, from the right person, in the right place, at the right time.

In future if people need to contact the NHS for urgent care there will only be three numbers; 999 for life-threatening emergencies; their GP practice; and 111.

2. Background

Research with the public has made clear for some time that the public find it difficult to access NHS services when they develop unplanned, unexpected healthcare needs. Changes in the way in which services are delivered have added to the complexity of the urgent healthcare system.

The result is that many people are unclear which services are available to meet their urgent, unplanned needs and how they should be accessed, especially outside normal working hours when GP practices are closed or when they are away from home.

NHS reviews have also found that patients want better information and more help to understand how to access the best care, especially urgent care, when they need it.

It was identified that the introduction of a three-digit number could provide significant benefits, not only to the public, but to the NHS as well.

The coalition government stated its commitment to a national roll-out of the new NHS 111 service as part of an integrated 24/7 urgent care service in the document *The Coalition our programme for government* and the White Paper *Equity and excellence: Liberating the NHS*.

On 1st October 2011 the Prime Minister, David Cameron and the Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley announced that the NHS 111 service would be operating across England by April 2013.

3. How the NHS 111 service works

The NHS 111 service is available via an easy to remember, three-digit number – 111. Calls from landlines and mobile phones are free and the service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to respond to people's healthcare needs, when:

- they need medical help fast, but it is not a 999 emergency;
- they do not know who to call for medical help or do not have a GP to call;
- they think they need to go to A&E or another NHS urgent care service; or
- they require health information or reassurance about what to do next.

Callers to 111 are put through to a team of highly trained call advisers, who are supported by experienced nurses. They use a clinical assessment system and ask questions to assess callers' needs and determine the most appropriate course of action, including:

- callers facing an emergency will have an ambulance despatched without delay;
- callers who can care for themselves will have information, advice and reassurance provided;
- callers requiring further care or advice will be referred to a service that has the appropriate skills and resources to meet their needs; or
- callers requiring services outside the scope of NHS 111 will be provided with details of an alternative service.

4. Service specification for NHS 111

The NHS 111 service operates according to the following core principles:

- Completion of a clinical assessment on the first call without the need for a call back.
- Ability to refer callers to other services for definitive clinical management.
- Ability to transfer clinical assessment data to other providers and book appointments where appropriate.
- Ability to dispatch an ambulance without delay.

5. Benefits

The introduction of the new NHS 111 service is expected to provide key benefits to the public and the NHS:

- Improve the public's access to urgent healthcare.
- Help people use the right service first time including self care.
- Provide commissioners with management information regarding the usage of services:

6. Implementation in Oxfordshire

- We are aiming for a July launch date in Oxfordshire.
- The 111 service in Oxfordshire has been developed by Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Oxfordshire Primary Care Trust in partnership with South Central Ambulance Service and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust.
- In conjunction with the Department of Health we are following a four stage assurance process which will ensure robust testing of the 111 system before we go live.
- The 111 number will be available to callers living in or visiting Oxfordshire. However initially, the Thame area and some other border areas may not be able to access 111.
- A communications and marketing plan is being implemented, including:
 - In September there will be a mail-drop to relevant postcode areas in Oxfordshire
 - Press adverts during September
 - Further marketing is being planned by the Department of Health for November to cover the Christmas period.
 - Information will also be shared with the public via posters and leaflets being displayed in GP practices and other health service sites.

7. Further information

A dedicated email address has been set up for 111 queries. Please contact this address for any further questions you may have: NHS.111@oxnet.nhs.uk