

CAF/22/05 – An exploration of how parents of children under 5 respond to childhood illness and make decisions to use unscheduled care services as a single system within NHS Scotland.

Children under the age of five are common users of unplanned or emergency use of the National Health Service (NHS) known as unscheduled care. One in three children under 5 attend the Accident and Emergency (A&E) every year. Children under 5 make up to 40% of General Practitioner (GP) work. Most calls to NHS telephone helplines are about children under 5.

Patients need to be able to find the right NHS care at the right place. However, children go to one service when another would be better. For example, 40% of children who go to A&E could have been received treatment in the community. In Scotland, a parent can contact their GP, community pharmacist, A&E, NHS 24, Health Visitor or Family Nurse for health advice. However, different health services which seem to offer the same help can confuse patients.

Children under 5 are one of the most likely to attend unscheduled care but there is no research looking at how their parents decide who to contact, and when or where to go. We need research that looks at how parents of children under five in Scotland decide to attend unscheduled care.

Patients get help from other people and services in their personal network to help access support when ill. We need research that looks at how these personal networks make it easier or harder for parents to access the right unscheduled care.

My aims are:

- To find out how parents of children under 5 in Scotland seek help and advice when their child shows signs of illness
- To find out how parents use social networks when making decisions about accessing unscheduled care
- To find out if the Universal Health Visiting Pathway impacts a parent's social network

To do this, I will:

- Review of all the evidence on how parents of children under 5 access healthcare in Scotland
- Carry out workshops with mothers and fathers to identify important topics to be used in a social network analysis and survey
- Ask parents to write down and describe who they would contact if their child was unwell, with the most important/first to be contacted in the centre
- This will be repeated to see if/how the parents' network changes before and after a baby is born
- Carry out an online survey to find out who, how, and why parents seek support when their child is unwell

Patient and Public Involvement

Parents are the experts on my research topic. Parents will take an active part throughout the research with regular meetings held with a local parenting group.

This group will:

- Discuss what I find from reviewing the current evidence and research on the topic
- Help review and identify important topics and questions to be covered in the social network analysis
- Read and comment on participant information sheets to make sure the language is clear and easily understood

After my research is finished, I will share it by:

- Writing about the findings in an academic journal
- Write about the research in a magazine for Health Visitors
- Present posters and presentations at conferences, universities, charities, and workplaces of professionals who work with and support families
- Write blogs and summaries throughout the research process for parenting charities and groups
- Creating pictures and charts of the results to share on social media