

Key Points:

- Replaces previous version dated June 2003
- NHS Services specifically aimed at older people are identified.
- Updated information about over 75 health checks
- Change to cover page layout
- Change to Font Style

NHS services and older people

This fact sheet is aimed at people over 60 and provides information on NHS services for older people in Scotland.

Readers living in England, Wales or Northern Ireland can obtain a similar Factsheet 44, *NHS services and older people* available by telephoning 0800 00 99 66 (free call), from the website www.ageconcern.org.uk or by writing to Age Concern FREEPOST (SWB 30375) ASHBURTON, Devon TQ13 7ZZ.

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1. Local management and delivery of health services

The National Health Service in Scotland is the main provider of primary and acute health care. Care is organised at a local level by Health Boards, who oversee the delivery of services. Primary care includes the GP service, most mental health services, rehabilitation, most non-acute geriatric services and the community nursing service. Acute services cover, for example, surgery and specialist medical care such as cancer treatment. In rural Scotland, most Health Boards have a single acute hospital in their region whereas those serving a metropolitan area, such as Lothian, contain more than one.

The health and social care of older people across Scotland follows a fairly standard pattern. The first point of contact is usually the General Practitioner who will then refer an individual to an appropriate support service where necessary.

The GP is the central member of the 'primary care team', a team of professionals from various health disciplines who work from a GP surgery or health centre. Other members of the team may include the district nurse, health visitor, practice nurse, community psychiatric nurse, chiropodist, therapists, social worker, receptionist and medical secretary. General practitioners are independent self-employed doctors who can have a contract with the Health Board to provide services within the NHS.

GPs may be part of a Local Community Healthcare Co-operative (LHCC). An LHCC is a group of GPs and other primary care staff who deliver health care in a particular geographical area.

1.1 Registering with a GP

Except in an emergency, you need to be registered with a GP before you can receive treatment. Everyone living in the UK has a right to register with a GP. This right is based on residency and not nationality or payment of taxes. You can choose your GP, providing their list is not full and they agree to accept you. GP practices operate on a geographical basis.

You are normally accepted if you live close by, as this will allow a GP to visit you at home in an emergency. In some areas there may be a stricter 'catchment area' system which includes designated streets only.

If there are several practices in your area, ring and ask if they are accepting new patients.

There is a maximum number of patients allowed on each practice list. The GP is not obliged to take you as a patient, although he or she is unlikely to refuse unless the list is full.

If a practice is enrolling new patients, call in to collect a copy of the practice leaflet. This will name the GPs, indicate surgery hours, explain the appointment system and arrangements for getting advice over the phone, for collecting repeat prescriptions, for out of hours provision and requesting home visits. It could also include details on special clinics offered for those with chronic conditions such as diabetes.

To find out about GPs in your area, contact your local Health Board. They will be able to send you a list of GP practices. The list they send may include practice details such as the number of GPs and whether male and female GPs are available. You will find the telephone number of all Scottish Health Boards at the end of this factsheet.

Details of local GPs and dentists are also available on the NHS Scotland website: www.show.scot.nhs.uk.

A visit to the practice will allow you to see the facilities and discover how easy it is to park nearby or get there by public transport. You can also discuss any specific needs you may have. These may include wheelchair access to consulting rooms or availability of a GP who speaks your language, if English is not your language of choice.

Before being accepted as a new patient or as part of the registration process, you will be offered a basic health check, usually with the practice nurse. All newly registered patients will be given the opportunity to undergo a medical check and asked to complete a new patient questionnaire, which is totally confidential. This allows them to assess your general health and familiarise themselves with your medical history.

If you have difficulty finding a practice to accept you, contact your local Health Board. There is a responsibility to assign you to a GP if you are unable to find one yourself. Your Health Board will explain the process.

1.2 Registering with a GP for residents of care homes

If you move permanently into a care home locally, your own GP may be willing to continue to care for you. If this is not possible, a number of local GPs may provide services for residents of particular homes.

You should receive the same range of NHS services that you received when living in your own home. There should not be any additional charges for GP services or NHS services the GP says you need.

1.3 Making an Appointment

Most practices operate an appointment system. If the GP of your choice is free, you can make an appointment with them. There is usually a system to allow you to see a GP in an emergency if there are no free appointments. In many practices it is possible to speak to a GP or practice nurse on the phone if you call at an agreed time.

1.4 Home Visits

Most GPs will make home visits but only to patients they feel are too ill to visit the surgery. Give a full description of your condition when you phone the surgery. This will allow an informed decision to be made on whether a home visit is necessary. If possible call the practice in the morning to allow for a visit the same day.

1.5 Out-of-hours services

Many practices use a designated out-of-hours service or work with a local GP co-operative to manage their out-of-hours provision. Calling the practice number will usually put you in touch with the appropriate service. Be prepared to describe how you feel and why you are worried. The GP or nurse will probably be able to tell how serious the problem is and in many cases can give advice or reassurance over the phone.

Check the practice leaflet for details. In many situations, the GP you see out of hours will not be your own doctor but probably one you do not know. He or she will send notes of the visit to your own doctor to be included in your medical records.

If you cannot find your practice phone number look in your telephone directory or in yellow pages under 'Doctors'.

Many health boards are currently consulting over changes to the out-of-hours services available, and services may be subject to change in the near future.

1.6 Changing your GP

If you are moving away from the area or have found another local GP who is willing to accept you, it is not necessary to tell your GP that you wish to change.

Once a new GP has agreed to accept you, the practice will contact your previous GP for your medical records. However you may, as a courtesy, wish to notify your GP of plans to leave the practice.

1.7 Removal from a GP's list

A GP can remove a patient from his or her list without needing to give a reason why. In the unlikely event that this happens you will receive a letter from your Health Board telling you this and advising you to find another GP. If you are unable to do so, the Health Board will help you find a new doctor. You are entitled to receive treatment from the former GP for 8 days (from the date of the letter that you have been removed from the list) or until you are accepted by another GP, whichever occurs first.

1.8 GP services when away from home or on holiday

If you know you will be living away from your usual home, in the UK, for up to three months, you may apply to a local practice to be accepted as a 'temporary resident'. If their list is not full, they will most likely accept you.

If you become ill on holiday and you are staying in a hotel, you should ask the hotel reception if they have an arrangement with a local practice. If staying with friends, you could approach their practice to see if they are willing to treat you.

1.9 Services provided by GPs

All GPs provide:

- prescriptions;
- health checkups;

- cervical smears;
- immunisation;
- sickness certificates if you are unable to work because of ill health.

Other services that may be provided include:

- health promotion clinics;
- contraception;
- minor surgery;
- counselling;
- medical examinations for insurance, seat belt exemptions etc (for a fee);
- complementary therapies.

2. Other NHS primary care services

2.1 Community pharmacy

Pharmacists are qualified to give advice on common complaints such as sore throats, colds, flu and aches and pains. Based on your symptoms, they can assess whether a visit to a doctor is advisable. A pharmacist can also answer questions about prescription or 'over-the-counter' medication you are taking. They can also advise on suitable over-the-counter medicines for minor conditions. Some pharmacists can prescribe a range of medications under certain circumstances.

2.2 Community equipment

Community equipment includes a wide range of equipment for home nursing usually provided by the NHS such as pressure relief mattresses and commodes. It also includes equipment for daily living items normally provided by social services such as shower chairs, raised toilet seats and lever taps. Communication aids such as low vision aids and flashing telephones are also included.

See Age Concern Factsheet 42s, *Disability equipment and how to get it*, for further information.

2.3 NHS primary care professionals

Your GP is able to refer you to health professionals with expertise to treat specific aspects of certain conditions. They may visit you at home or hold clinics at your own or another local practice or community health centre. In those instances where specialist equipment is required, it may be necessary to visit them at the local hospital.

You can access district nurses, chiropodists/podiatrists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech and language therapists, dieticians and palliative care nurses such as Macmillan or Marie Curie nurses through your GP.

For services such as chiropody, there are often eligibility criteria that you must meet in order to be treated as a NHS patient. Services such as nail cutting, unless you have an additional medical problem, are unlikely to be offered as NHS treatment. Your GP should be able to advise you.

Physiotherapists use a range of techniques to restore movement and function within the body. As well as conditions such as back pain and muscle strains they can help a much wider range of conditions such as osteoporosis or asthma.

Occupational therapists can advise on modifications or equipment that may be useful at home to increase the independence and mobility of a person with a disability. They can be accessed through a GP or social services.

Speech and language therapists can help not only with communication difficulties but also with eating and swallowing difficulties. These may arise following a stroke or in patients with dementia. They may also be accessed through social services.

Dieticians have expertise in nutrition. They can advise on suitable meals and eating patterns for diet related diseases such as irritable bowel syndrome, diabetes or coronary heart disease. They can also advise on menus provided in care homes and give general advice to those wishing to follow a healthy diet.

Interest in complementary therapies such as acupuncture, chiropractic, herbal medicine, homeopathy and osteopathy has increased in recent years.

They are sometimes available as an NHS service. If you are considering any of these therapies on a private basis, it is advisable to discuss this with your GP. This is particularly important if you are taking medication and might be recommended to take other medication or herbal remedies by the therapist. It is important the therapist has the appropriate qualifications and insurance to treat you.

In some practices, GPs are able to refer you to a counsellor. However there may be quite a long waiting list. Your GP will be confident of the qualifications and competency of the counsellor you are referred to.

3. Advice and information to complement GP services

NHS 24

website: www.nhs24.com

tel: 08454 24 24 24 (local call rate)

NHS 24 is a confidential 24-hour nurse consultation service to provide the public with advice on health or health services, an assessment of symptoms by a trained nurse, and, if appropriate, direct access to the service you need. It will also offer advice on social care, benefits and on keeping warm and healthy in winter. It will be available 24 hours a day via one local-rate phone call.

NHS 24 is rolling out across Scotland in a phased programme. By August 2004, NHS 24 is available in Greater Glasgow, Grampian, Ayrshire & Arran, Fife, Dumfries & Galloway and the Highlands. The whole of Scotland should be covered by the end of 2004.

NHS Direct

www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk allows you to look for information on a wide range of health conditions, treatments and operations. It also provides information on healthy living and gives links to other web sites you may find helpful. A specialist section looks in depth at a range of topics including diabetes, stroke and breast cancer. There is also a self-help guide to treating common illnesses at home.

NHS Direct is based in England and there may be some information not appropriate to services in Scotland. NHS 24 online will be developed over time to provide similar information for Scotland.

4. Dental care in the NHS

Dentists can choose whether to work privately or to have a contract with the Health Board, whereby they see patients under the NHS. Dentists work in three ways in the NHS: General dental practitioners, to whom most people go for treatment. They are also known as family dentists, or just dentists.

Dental departments in hospitals, where patients may be referred for specialist treatment by their GP or family dentist. As well as departments in general hospitals there are also specialist dental hospitals and dental schools. You can change your dentist at any time. A dentist can remove an NHS patient from their list but a minimum of three months notice must be given.

4.1 Choosing an NHS dentist

Health Boards maintain lists of dentists in their area who do NHS work. This dental list is available at the offices of your Health Board and at your Local Health Council and may also be found in libraries and offices. The dental list will tell you the names of dentists, qualifications, the address of the surgery, surgery times and any other information on languages spoken, wheelchair access etc.

If you have problems finding a dentist in your area prepared to accept you as an NHS patient contact your Health Board for advice. When making your appointment for dental treatment make sure you tell the dentist that you want to be treated on the NHS or you may find yourself being charged as a private patient. If the practice does provide treatment under the NHS you will be asked to sign a GP17 form applying to join the dentist's list as a continuing care patient.

4.2 Home visits from the dentist

If you have been accepted for treatment and your condition makes it impossible for you to get to the dental surgery, your dentist must visit you at home, provided this is not more than five miles from the surgery. There is no extra charge for this. If you find it hard to leave your house and cannot find a dentist to accept you as a patient contact your Health Board. For more information about dental services see Age Concern Factsheet 5, *Dental care and older people*.

5. Specialist NHS treatment and hospital services

Outpatient/inpatient appointments

If your condition requires the opinion of an expert you will be referred to a consultant in a specialist field of medicine. The appointment is usually at the local hospital.

5.1 Inpatient care

The NHS in Scotland aims to eliminate the need for patients to share mixed sex wards.

5.2 Transport to and from hospital

Most hospitals offer a non emergency patient transport service (PTS) to help those who are medically unfit to travel and have no alternative means of transport. In some areas volunteer car schemes can help those who have difficulties using public transport. These schemes are run by a variety of organisations including Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), Womens Royal Voluntary Service (WRVS), British Red Cross and local volunteer centres. The Community Transport Association can give you contact details if there is a community transport scheme in your area. See section 8.3 Useful organisations.

There is also a scheme to help patients on a low income, who have difficulty funding transport costs, to attend hospital for consultant appointments or treatment. For further information about this scheme see the Department of Health leaflet HC11 'Are you entitled to help with help costs', available from your local Social Security Office, Post Office or from the hospital where you are being treated.

6. Special NHS Services for older people

Health promotion and prevention of ill health are important aspects of health care. A number of initiatives have been launched to help and support older people to continue to live healthy, independent lives.

6.1 Free prescriptions for over 60s

Anyone aged 60 or over does not have to pay for NHS prescriptions. There is a box on the back of the prescription you will be asked to sign. Some GP practices have a computerised prescribing system which will show your date of birth on the prescription. If this is not the case, you may be asked to provide evidence of your age. This is more likely if you are not using your regular pharmacy.

6.2 Repeat Prescriptions

If the doctor wishes you to have a repeat prescription without seeing him or her every time, this will be put on the computer and you should hand in the tear-off part of the prescription filled in, to the surgery. The prescription can then be collected later.

6.3 Home delivery of prescriptions

Some pharmacies are able to make deliveries to people who are housebound or have a service to collect repeat prescriptions from local GP practices. If this might be useful to you, ask the pharmacist. There may be a charge for such services.

6.4 Managing your medicines

Pharmacists can also offer patients who have difficulty managing their medicines 'compliance aids', also known as 'monitored dosage systems'. They can act as a reminder to patients to take doses of their medicines. The aids, which are in the form of small boxes, hold seven days of patients' medicine supplies in compartments. There may be a charge for this service. It is always advisable to discuss any difficulty you may have in managing your medicines with your pharmacist in order that the most effective solution may be found.

6.5 Free NHS sight tests for over 60s

Anyone aged 60 or over is entitled to a free NHS sight test. It is generally suggested that adults have a sight test every two years. However, a sight test every 12 months has been recommended for those aged 70 and over by a joint working party of the UK Department of Health and professional bodies representing optometrists.

It is however up to individual opticians to use their professional judgement in individual cases. Some opticians only offer 'private' sight tests. Therefore it is important to confirm you will be having an 'NHS' sight test when you book your appointment. You should also check whether they are including the full range of tests. Tests for those conditions such as glaucoma and other eye diseases that are more likely in older people are particularly important.

The Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) can give you comprehensive information about sight tests. See section 8.3 Useful organisations.

6.6 Audiology services

If you think you are hard of hearing and may need a hearing aid, the first thing you need to do is visit your GP. Your GP may refer you to the audiology department at the local hospital to have your hearing tested. In most areas, direct referral to the audiology department is only possible for people over 60 and depends on local arrangements.

Some GPs arrange for audiology staff to visit their surgery or health centre to run a clinic, so you may be able to have an assessment of your hearing there instead of at the hospital.

If the tests suggest you would find a hearing aid useful, the audiology staff will choose an NHS hearing aid for you. There are different types of hearing aid available on the National Health Service and the type prescribed to individual patients is based on clinical judgement and clinical priorities.

The companies that make NHS hearing aids also supply the private sector, but NHS provision is separate from private purchase. You are still entitled to an NHS hearing aid if you buy a hearing aid privately, but you cannot get financial help from the NHS to buy an aid.

Further information and factsheets about your entitlements, equipment and services are available from RNIB. See section 8.3 Useful organisations.

6.7 The right to an annual health check for people over the age of 75

Routine health checks are available in primary care for people aged 75 or over. They usually comprise simple assessments by a nurse or doctor, aimed at picking up new or worsening problems.

GP's are not required to offer people over the age of 75 an annual health check, but if you have not had one during the previous twelve months your GP should arrange a health check if you ask. The health check can be at the surgery but should be available at home for those unable to visit the practice.

6.8 Free flu and pneumococcal immunisation for over 65s

Complications such as pneumonia or severe bronchitis can follow a dose of flu. It is therefore Scottish Executive policy to offer a flu vaccination and pneumococcal immunisation to all people aged 65 and over, as well as to those under 65 who have long term medical complaints that put them at risk. You should be invited in the late summer/early autumn by your GP practice to have a flu jab. (Pneumococcal infection causes a broad range of diseases in older people and it is the most common cause of serious pneumonia).

6.9 Breast screening

The NHS Scotland breast screening programme provides screening every three years to women in UK aged 50 and over. Women aged 50-64 are routinely invited for screening. If you are over 70 you will not automatically be invited, but have the right to screening every three years on request. If it is more than three years since you had a mammogram, you can contact your local GP practice for further information.

6.10 Help with health costs – low income scheme

People 60 and over do not pay for prescriptions or NHS sight tests. However dental checkups, dental treatment and new glasses do have to be paid for unless you are able to claim the guarantee part of Pension Credit.

However you may be able to get help with these costs, through the NHS Low Income Scheme, if you are 60 or over, have a low income and savings of £12,000 or less.

Depending on your circumstances you may be entitled to full or limited help with the cost of dental treatment and glasses. Help with costs of travel to and from hospital for consultant appointments and treatment are also possible through this scheme.

For further information about this scheme see the Department of Health leaflet HC11 'Are you entitled to help with help costs', available from your local Social Security Office, Post Office or from the hospital where you are being treated. See also the Age Concern information sheet (IS20) – *Help with health costs for older people*.

7. Resolving problems and making complaints

You may feel you want to complain if you are unhappy with services or the attitude of staff you come in contact with. You can often resolve such issues by discussing them with the health professional, practice manager or nurse in charge.

7.1 Advocacy services

If you do not feel able to raise an issue personally, you can enlist the help of an advocate. Advocates are individuals, independent of any health or social work body, who offer support and advice to vulnerable people about rights, care and services that they are entitled to receive. Ways of offering this service are currently being developed and promoted within NHS Scotland. You can find a list of independent advocacy services through the advocacy safeguards agency (see 8.3 for contact details).

7.2 Making a formal complaint

The current UK-wide NHS complaints procedure was introduced in April 1996. It has three stages:

Local Resolution: where the service provider attempts to resolve a complaint as directly and as quickly as possible, with the primary aim of being fair to both the person making the complaint and to its staff. Local resolution may involve an immediate informal response from frontline staff or it may require an internal investigation, use of conciliation or direct action by a Chief Executive from the Health Board.

Independent review: where a complaint cannot be resolved locally, the person making the complaint may apply for an *independent review*. The right to have a complaint reviewed is not automatic. A request for a review is considered by the Convener, who reviews whether the process has been carried out appropriately; he/she makes decision on whether an Independent Review should be carried out in consultation with an independent lay person who has received training in chairing review panels.

Ombudsman review where the person making the complaint is refused an independent review or is dissatisfied with the outcome of such a review, they may ask the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman to consider the matter. The person complained against can also seek an Ombudsman review in certain circumstances.

The Ombudsman can investigate complaints about the following:

- poor service;
- failure to provide or purchase a service you have a right to receive;
- administrative failures; *and*
- complaints about care provided by a NHS professional.

Your local Health Council will be able to advise, should you wish to make a formal complaint about NHS services. Contact details about your local Health council can be found in your local phone book or through the SHOW website or through the Scottish Association of Health Councils. See section 8.5 NHS websites.

8. Further information

8.1 NHS Scotland helpline

In Scotland, further information about NHS services is available from the NHS Scotland helpline on 0800 224488 (free call). In many regions of Scotland, (and in all areas by the end of 2004) you can also get information from NHS 24. Contact NHS 24 at www.nhs24.com or by phone on 0845 424 24 24 (local call rate).

8.2 Health Board telephone numbers

Argyll and Clyde Health Board:	0141 842 7200
Ayrshire and Arran Health Board:	01292 611040
Borders Health Board:	01896 825500
Dumfries and Galloway Health Board:	01387 246246
Fife Health Board:	01592 712812
Forth Valley Health Board:	01786 463031
Grampian Health Board:	01224 663456
Greater Glasgow Health Board:	0141 201 4444
Highland Health Board:	01463 239851
Lanarkshire Health Board:	01698 281313
Lothian Health Board:	0131 536 9000
Orkney Health Board:	01856 885400
Shetland Health Board:	01595 696767
Tayside Health Board:	01382 645151
Western Isles Health Board:	01851 702997

8.3 Useful organisations

Advocacy Safeguards Agency, 1-2 St Andrews Square, Edinburgh EH2 2BD, tel: 0131 524 9380, fax: 0131 524 9381, website: www.advocacysafeguards.org. The Advocacy Safeguards Agency is committed to developing independent advocacy services. They also produce a list of independent advocacy providers throughout Scotland.

British Red Cross Scotland, 204 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4HL, tel: 0141 332 9591UK, 9 Grosvenor Crescent, London SW1X 7EJ, tel: 020 7235 5454, email: information@redcross.org.uk, website: www.redcross.org.uk. The British Red Cross offers a range of community services including community transport schemes and a short-term wheelchair loan service. Call the above number for your local office contact number or look at their website. The website lists the groups and the services offered by individual groups.

Community Transport Association (UK), Highbank, Hatton St, Hyde Cheshire SK14 2NY, tel: 0161 351 1475.

(Scotland) advice, Annat House, South Quay, Ferryden, Montrose, Angus DD10 9SL, tel: 01674 677443, email: ctauk@communitytransport.com, website: www.communitytransport.com.

The Community Transport Association can tell you whether there is a community transport scheme in your area and give you a contact number. They do not keep details of services offered by each scheme.

Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB), Customer Services, PO Box 173 Peterborough PE2 6WS, helpline: 0845 766 99 99 (local call rate), typetalk service: 18001 0845 766 99 99 (local call rate).

RNIB Scotland, Dunedin House, 25 Ravelston Terrace, Edinburgh EH4 3TP, tel: 0131 311 8500, email: helpline@rnib.org.uk, website: www.rnib.org.uk. RNIB provides a range of useful information for those with sight problems. The helpline can advise on all their services and campaigns.

RNID (Royal National Institute for Deaf People), 19-23 Featherstone Street, London EC1Y 8SL, Information line: 0808 808 0123 (free call), textphone: 0808 808 9000 (free call), fax: 020 7296 8199, email: informationline@rnid.org.uk, website: www.rnid.org.uk. The RNID Information Line offers free confidential and impartial information on a range of subjects including employment, equipment, legislation, benefits and many issues relating to deafness and hearing loss. For further information contact the RNID Scotland office: tel: 0141 554 0053, textphone: 0141 550 5754, fax: 0141 554 5837.

Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance, 138 Slateford Road, Edinburgh, EH14 1LR, tel 0131 455 8183, fax 0131 455 8182, email: enquiry@siaa.org.uk. The Scottish Independent Advocacy Alliance provides information, training, support and advice to independent advocacy providers, and promotes the interest of these organisations at a national level.

8.4 Health professionals organisations

Health Professional Council (HPC), Park House, 184 Kennington Park Road, London SE11 4BU, tel: 020 7582 0866, email: info@hpc-uk.org, website: www.hpc-uk.org. The HPC is the new independent UK-wide regulatory body for 12 healthcare professions including chiropodists /podiatrists, dieticians, occupational therapists, physiotherapists and speech and language therapists. If you want to consult one of these therapists privately, they can confirm whether the person is registered. Registration information is also available on their website.

Chartered Society of Physiotherapy, UK: 14 Bedford Row, London WC1R 4ED, tel: 020 7306 6666. **CSP Scotland**: 21 Queen Street, Edinburgh EH2 1JX, tel: 0131 226 1441, email: scotland@csp.org.uk, website: www.csp.org.uk. The website section physio2u allows you to identify private registered practitioners in your health board area with particular areas of expertise e.g. pain management, orthopaedic. It also includes information on the range of conditions physiotherapists can treat.

Society of Chiropodist and Podiatrists, 1 Fellmonger's Path, Tower Bridge Road, London SE1 3LY, tel: 020 7234 8620, website: www.feetforlife.org. The Society produces information on footcare. Their website www.feetforlife.org contains information on keeping feet healthy and common foot problems. It also allows you to search for a registered chiropodist locally.

8.5 NHS websites

SHOW - Scotland's Health on the Web (NHS Scotland), website: www.show.scot.nhs.uk. The Health Information section allows you to search for NHS organisations and services in your area. It also includes information on topical health issues and links to sites on healthy living.

Scottish Executive website for older people website: www.scotland.gov.uk/olderpeople. Information and advice on a range of issues that affect older people in Scotland, including information on health and healthcare.

NHS 24, website:www.nhs24.com.

NHS 24 is a confidential 24-hour nurse consultation service to provide the public with advice on health or health services, an assessment of symptoms by a trained nurse, and, if appropriate, direct access to the service you need. It will also offer advice on social care, benefits and on keeping warm and healthy in winter. It will be available 24 hours a day via one local-rate phone call.

NHS 24 is rolling out across Scotland in a phased programme. The whole of Scotland should be covered by the end of 2004.

NHS 24: 08454 24 24 24 (local call rate).

NHS Direct online, website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk. This service also provides health information. It is based in England and there may be some information not appropriate to services in Scotland. NHS 24 online will be developed over time to provide similar information for Scotland.

NHS Quality Improvement Scotland, website: www.nhshealthquality.org. Aims to improve the quality of healthcare in Scotland. They set standards and monitor performance, and provide advice, guidance and support to NHS Scotland on effective clinical practice and service improvements.

Scottish Association of Health Councils, 24a Palmerston Place, Edinburgh EH12 5AL, tel: 0131 220 4101, website: www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sahc. Lists contact details for Scotland's local Health Councils (who can also be found in the phone book or on the main SHOW website). Health Councils will assist with complaints against the NHS.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman, 23 Walker Street, Edinburgh EH3 7HX, tel: 0870 011 5378 (national call rate), email: enquiries@scottishombudsman.org.uk, website: www.scottishombudsman.org.uk. Provides a free, independent complaints system for public services in Scotland. Deals with complaints about the NHS, including complaints about hospital staff, GPs, dentists and other health professionals.

9. Further information from Age Concern

The following information sheet may be relevant:

Factsheet 5	<i>Dental care and older people</i>
Factsheet42	<i>Disability equipment and how to get it</i>
Info SheetIS/20	<i>Help with health costs for older people</i>

If you would like

- any additional factsheets mentioned (up to a maximum of 5 will be sent free of charge)
- a full list of factsheets and/or a book catalogue
- further information or if you have questions arising from this factsheet

phone 0800 00 99 66 (free call) or write to Age Concern FREEPOST (SWB 30375), Ashburton, Devon TQ13 7ZZ.

For people with hearing loss who have access to a textphone, calls can be made by Typetalk, which relays conversations between text and voice via an operator.

Age Concern's series of over 40 factsheets is available as a subscription service to those whose work involves older people; for details of this service please call us on 08705 00 99 66 (national call rate) and ask for our factsheet subscription leaflet.

Age Concern provides factsheets free to older people, their families and people who work with them. If you would like to make a donation towards the work of Age Concern Scotland, you can send a cheque or postal order (made payable to Age Concern Scotland) to Age Concern Scotland, 113 Rose Street, Edinburgh EH2 3DT. Find out more about Age Concern Scotland online at www.ageconcernscotland.org.uk, or Age Concern England at www.ageconcern.org.uk.

If you have questions arising from this factsheet, or it does not cover the information you require, please contact the Scottish Helpline for Older People, a confidential and impartial service managed by Age Concern Scotland, tel: 0845 125 9732 (local call rate), Monday to Friday 10am - 4pm. The address is Age Concern Scotland, 113 Rose Street, Edinburgh EH2 3DT

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No factsheet can ever be a complete guide to the law, which also changes from time to time. Therefore please ensure that you have an up to date factsheet and that it clearly applies to your situation. Legal advice should always be taken if you are in doubt.

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