

Medicines for Self-Care – Guidance for Prescribers

Position Statement

As part of its self-care strategy, NHS Nottingham North and East, Nottingham West and Rushcliffe Clinical Commissioning Groups recommend that patients visit their local community pharmacy to purchase medicines and treatments for minor, short term conditions.

It is advised that all prescribers, including GPs and non-medical prescribers, direct patients to purchase recommended, readily available, over the counter medicines (OTC), treatments and products.

Introduction

Following a national consultation, guidance has been produced by NHS England and NHS Clinical Commissioners on the restriction of prescribing medications for conditions which fall into the following categories:

- A condition that is self-limiting and does not require medical advice or treatment as it will clear up on its own; and/or
- A condition that is a minor illness and is suitable for self-care and treatment with items that can easily be purchased over the counter from a pharmacy.
- Vitamins, minerals and probiotics: These are classified as items of limited clinical effectiveness, where there is a lack of robust evidence for clinical effectiveness.

The Clinical Commissioning Groups recommend that patients purchase medications and products from local pharmacies for the treatment of minor acute conditions as part of self-care. Many of the medicines and treatments are more expensive when they are prescribed on an NHS prescription as opposed to being purchased directly from pharmacies and supermarkets. Local pharmacies are able to support individuals with advice for the treatment of minor ailments and offer a readily accessible alternative healthcare pathway for patients. There is no need for an appointment, many pharmacies are open for extended hours, over seven days a week and stock a wide range of inexpensive treatments.

As a result, prescribers are recommended **not to write a prescription for OTC medicines, treatments and products**, except in the case of chronic conditions or where there are exceptions to self-care (see below).

General exceptions as defined in the national guidance:

There are certain scenarios where patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed:

- Patients prescribed an OTC treatment for a long term condition (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease).
- For the treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to OTC medicines).
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor (i.e. those with red flag symptoms).
- Treatment for complex patients (e.g. immunosuppressed patients).
- Patients on prescription only treatments.
- Patients prescribed OTC products to treat an adverse effect or symptom of a more complex illness and/or prescription only medications should continue to have these products prescribed on the NHS.
- Circumstances where the product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold OTC to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies,

children and/or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding. Community pharmacists will be aware of what these are and can advise accordingly.

- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self-care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an OTC product.
- Patients where the clinician considers that the presenting symptom is due to a condition that would not be considered a minor condition.
- Circumstances where the prescriber believes that in their clinical judgement, exceptional circumstances exist that warrant deviation from the recommendation to self-care.
- Individual patients where the clinician considers that their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of medical, mental health or significant social vulnerability to the extent that their health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. **To note that being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance. This includes having a prescription pre-payment certificate.** Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues.

The NHS belongs to everybody and we must all ensure that its resources are used in the best possible way for all patients.

Treatments for Self-Limiting Conditions

Appendix One lists the conditions for which OTC items should not be routinely prescribed in primary care. **This is included as a guide and is not promoted as an exhaustive list.**

This list includes conditions which are considered to be self-limiting and so does not need treatment, or which lends itself to self-care. Prescribed products aimed at treating the symptoms of many of these ailments may not offer value for money.

An increasing range of medicines is available for purchase and it is expected that patients will purchase such medicines after seeking appropriate advice from a community pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

Community pharmacists should not advise patients to request prescriptions for medicines available for self-limiting conditions and minor health problems where these are readily available to purchase.

Appendix Two contains details of the rationale behind the guidance and can be used to remind pharmacists of 'red flag' symptoms for patients presenting with the conditions covered by self-care to determine when referral is appropriate.

Clinical judgement should be used when considering whether it is acceptable to ask a patient to purchase their medication e.g. paracetamol taken on a 'when required' basis can be purchased in small quantities, however regular full dose paracetamol for chronic pain may be less suitable for purchase due to the restrictions in place relating to quantities of medication involved.

Patients and the public have access to an increasing range of resources for advice on medicines use and when they should seek GP care. Patients can be referred to NHS 111, [NHS Choices](#) and [The Self Care Forum](#) for further advice and patient information.

Reference: NHS England, NHS Clinical Commissioners. Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in Primary Care: Guidance for CCGs. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-guidance-for-ccgs/> (accessed April 2018)