

Information for clinicians (October 2017)

Reducing prescribing of medicines and products that can be purchased without a prescription

The following documents are available for download:

1. [Information leaflets](#)
2. [Information on reducing waste associated with repeat prescribing](#)

The NHS in North West (NW) London is asking GPs and other prescribers to reduce prescribing of medicines and products that can be purchased without a prescription.

This request is consistent with promotion of self-care. If the patient requires the medicine on a second occasion, they will know they don't need to make a doctor's appointment but can go straight to a pharmacist to get it. This will save both the patient and the doctor time.

National guidance on prescribing over the counter (OTC) medicines is likely at some stage, but unlikely before Spring 2018. NW London CCGs envisage aligning their approach with national guidance if and when such guidance is published. The NW London financial position means that it is sensible and appropriate to implement this approach now (October 2017); we cannot afford to wait until Spring 2018.

Recommendation to prescribers

The products to which this recommendation applies are [here](#).

1. As usual, consider whether the patient has an indication for using the medicine or product, with the likely benefit outweighing the likely risk.
2. If use of the product is indicated:
 - i. Inform the patient* that it can be purchased without a prescription
 - ii. ideally, tell the patient roughly how much the product is likely to cost (a list of indicative retail prices is [here](#))
 - iii. **ask if they will buy it. If the patient's answer is 'no' (i.e. the patient* is unable or unwilling to purchase the product), or if you are not confident in their 'yes', the product should be prescribed.**

The CCGs are not asking any prescriber to have lengthy conversations with patients about this. If the patient says s/he is not willing to buy the medicine, or if the prescriber is not confident in the patient saying that s/he will buy it, the CCGs recommend simply prescribing it.

3. (Optional) give the patient* an [information sheet](#) about purchasing OTC medicines. The CCGs will supply these sheets with the option to have paper or electronic copies or both.
4. **Exception groups** - If use of a product from the list is indicated for a person in one of the following groups, it should be prescribed:
 - School age children, if the product needs to be given at school. *Many schools will not administer medicines that do not have a dispensing label bearing the child's name and the dose*
 - care home residents

- individuals with funded care packages where a carer is required to administer a medicine or product
- anyone officially declared homeless
- people with a diagnosis of dementia
- people with a diagnosed learning disability.

*Or their parent or guardian if the patient is a child.

During development of the recommendation, GPs who contributed to its design could not think of reasons for routinely prescribing the following medicines. It seems reasonable to expect the number of prescriptions for the following to be 'low' (which the CCGs will not be defining).

- Antiperspirants
- bath additives
- colic treatments
- cough & cold remedies
- creams or suppositories for haemorrhoids (patient information leaflets will advise the user when to talk to a doctor or pharmacist)
- herbal and complementary supplements
- OTC products for hair removal
- OTC wart and verruca treatments
- teething gels
- tonics
- travel sickness tablets

The proposed recommendations:

- Entail asking patients **if** they will buy products, recognising that the answer can be 'yes' or 'no'.
- Do not 'ban' any medicine or product from being prescribed
- Do not require prescribers to ask patients about their financial circumstances
- Enable every patient with an indication for a medicine or listed product to access it.

Time spent saying that the medicine can be bought without a prescription and asking "will you buy it?" will be recovered when the prescriber does not have to generate prescriptions for patients who say they will buy the medicine, and by the avoidance of future appointments for the purpose of obtaining the same prescription.

NW London CCGs will encourage hospital and community providers to adopt the same approach, and will liaise directly with Urgent Care Centres and A&Es.

Communications materials available

1. There are two posters available for waiting rooms, letting patients know that if they need a medicine that can be purchased without a prescription, they may be asked if they will buy it. See [version 1](#) and [version 2](#).
2. A [leaflet](#) about buying over the counter medicines that GPs can choose to give to patients at the end of consultations.

3. The [list](#) of products the CCGs' recommendation applies to.
4. A [list](#) of example medicines within each group with their approximate retail purchase prices.

General practices wishing to order more copies of any of the above should email communications@nw.london.nhs.uk

Frequently asked questions

1. Does the recommendation apply when the patient is a child?

It does not apply if the medicine in question would need to be taken whilst the child is at school. Many schools will not administer medicines that do not have a dispensing label bearing the child's name and the dose. If the medicine will not need to be taken at school, or if the child is not school age, and provided that none of the other exemptions apply, the standard recommendation to prescribers applies.

2. If the patient complains, can the prescriber refer the complaint to his or her CCG?

If the recommendation above is followed, there should be little cause for a patient to complain. If he or she says that s/he is not willing to buy the medicine, or if the prescriber is not confident in the patient saying that s/he will buy it, the medicine should be prescribed. But yes, prescribers are encouraged to direct people who want to complain about the recommendation to the CCGs' complaints team:

- For Brent, Harrow or Hillingdon CCGs contact bhhcomplaints@nhs.net
- for Central London, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow or West London CCGs contact cwhhe.complaints@nhs.net

3. What to do if the patient is receiving repeat prescriptions for one of the OTC medicines that this recommendation applies to?

Provided they are not in one of the exception groups the next time you see them, inform them that the medicine can be purchased without a prescription, tell them roughly how much it would cost, and ask if they will buy it.
