

# Prescribing Wisely

## Frequently asked questions for community pharmacists

NHS North West London Collaboration of Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) has launched [Prescribing Wisely](#). It comprises two programmes to change the way we prescribe medicines across our eight boroughs.

- i) Reducing prescribing of medicines and products that can be purchased without a prescription
- ii) Reducing waste associated with repeat prescribing

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) for *Prescribing Wisely* are aimed at community pharmacists, although others may also find them useful.

### 1. What is the goal of the Prescribing Wisely programmes?

- To save time for GPs and patients:  
If a patient needs a supply of a medicine that is available without a prescription, especially a medicine they've previously used successfully for the same condition, they can go straight to a community pharmacist, saving the GP time.
- To support the cost effective use of NHS resources.
- To significantly reduce the waste resulting from the prescribing of medicines that patients do not need or do not intend to take. Pharmacies requesting repeat prescriptions on patients' behalf can result in waste, if medicines are requested that the patient will not take or is not running out of. The person who knows best about which medicines are required or running out is the person taking the medicines (or their carer).

### 2. How will the Prescribing Wisely programmes benefit my pharmacy?

One of the aims of *Prescribing Wisely* is to reduce the prescribing of medicines and products that can be readily purchased over the counter. Patients willing to purchase such medicines and products will be encouraged to go to pharmacies where they will also have access to advice from a healthcare professional.

*Prescribing wisely* encourages patients to take responsibility for ordering their own repeat prescriptions. This will reduce the time and resources that many pharmacies dedicate to ordering prescriptions on behalf of patients.

*Prescribing Wisely* patient leaflets also encourage patients to discuss any problems they have taking their medicines with their doctor or pharmacist.

Particular reference is made to accessing the Medicines Use Review (MUR) service and New Medicines Service (NMS).

### **3. Do I have to display the Prescribing Wisely posters in the pharmacy and give out the patient leaflets?**

We would like you to promote *Prescribing Wisely* because we think it will help your patients and members of the public understand the programmes. However, you are not obliged to do so.

### **4. Are you sure that GP practices know about Prescribing Wisely?**

Letters and communication materials have been sent to all general practices. Our CCG staff (usually pharmacists) are contacting or visiting practices to brief prescribers and practice staff about the *Prescribing Wisely* initiatives. If you feel that a practice does not understand the schemes, then please ask them to contact their CCG Medicines Management Team.

### **5. What if a patient can't afford to buy the medicines that they had told the GP they were willing to buy?**

- If a medicine is clinically indicated it will be prescribed for a patient who cannot afford to buy it.
- If you feel that a practice does not understand the scheme, then please ask them to contact their CCG Medicines Management Team.

### **6. What if the OTC medicine recommended by the prescriber is not licensed for the patient's age or their condition?**

Prescribers have been provided with details of over the counter medicines and the conditions for which they are appropriate. However, it was not possible to provide prescribers with full details of the marketing authorisations for all these medicines. Therefore, there may be a small number of occasions where the product recommended by the prescriber is not appropriate for sale over the counter due to restrictions contained within its marketing authorisation.

On these occasions, consider if there is an alternative over the counter medicine you can recommend which is licensed and would be appropriate. If none are appropriate then contact the prescriber to discuss and agree an appropriate course of action, which may include issuing a prescription.

**7. What if the OTC medicine is for long term, continuous use? In many cases these patients would have been referred to their GP if they came in for regular purchases of the medicine.**

You can still refer a patient to their GP when you feel that is clinically appropriate.

**8. What's the evidence that when patients do not request their repeat prescriptions directly from their general practice, this results in more waste?**

- Luton practices limited third party requests for repeat medicines and improved repeat prescribing systems. Estimated savings were 7% of the primary care prescribing budget, albeit over 2 years. An equivalent impact in NWL would be a considerable cost saving.
- Haringey CCG used Luton's audit methodology in late 2016. Results from 10 practices showed that patients had over-ordered by 6-17% (average 12%) and community pharmacies had over-ordered by 7-40% (average 19%).
- The 2015 BMJ awards shortlisted a general practice in Cardiff which asks patients to confirm the prescription request by countersigning and dating it. Prescribing costs fell by 7.5% in the first quarter after the change was made.
- Initial work in Coventry reduced two practices' overall costs for medicines by 8.9%.

**9. Have CCGs told general practices to stop accepting repeat prescription requests from pharmacies?**

The following recommendation has been made by the CCGs to GPs and general practice managers:

“After communicating with local community pharmacies and agreeing an appropriate transition period (length decided by the practice – unlikely to need to exceed 6 months), we recommend stopping accepting repeat prescription requests from community pharmacies, with the following exceptions for:

- Patients who cannot request their own repeat medicines, and who do not have a friend or carer who can request for them.
- Patients with disabilities who say that asking their community pharmacy to request their prescription is a ‘reasonable adjustment’ under the Equality Act 2010.”

## **10. Can a practice just stop accepting repeat requests from my pharmacy?**

CCGs do not recommend this. We are mindful that the change needs to be managed well in order to ensure that patients understand the change and so don't run out of their medicines.

We are asking general practices and community pharmacists to work together on this initiative.

## **11. Won't patients find it inconvenient to manage their own repeat prescriptions?**

It is quick and easy for patients who use a computer, tablet or smartphone to request their own repeat prescriptions online, at a time that suits them. Patients can also request their repeat prescriptions using repeat prescription request slips.

## **12. What if a patient can't get to the GP surgery and can't order online?**

Please make sure that you include the paper repeat prescription request slip when you dispense the patient's medicines. For prescriptions received electronically by the pharmacy, the pharmacy should print the repeat request slips when requested by the patient. This can be completed, signed and dated by the patient (or their carer) and then posted or delivered to the general practice. Alternatively, the patient can submit a written request for their repeat medicines to their general practice.

## **13. What if a patient cannot request their own repeat prescription?**

It is reasonable to expect most patients to request their repeat prescriptions directly from their general practice. Most who can't will have a family member or friend who can help them. For those who don't have such support, prescribers will discuss and agree appropriate alternative options with the patient for requesting their repeat prescriptions.

Options may include:

- Repeat prescriptions requested by another healthcare professional who works with the patient.
- The prescriber agreeing that the patient's community pharmacy can request the prescription on their behalf.
- The practice clinical pharmacist (if there is one) managing generation of the patient's repeat prescriptions.

#### 14. What if a patient is adamant that they want the pharmacy to request their repeat prescriptions on their behalf?

- CCGs have a duty to ensure that the NHS resources they are responsible for, including primary care prescribing budgets, are used cost-effectively and efficiently. It is, therefore, reasonable that the CCGs work with all stakeholders to reduce any waste resulting from prescribing.
- For *Prescribing Wisely*, the CCGs have engaged extensively with a range of stakeholders including prescribers, patients and pharmacists to develop the programmes. The *Prescribing Wisely* messages in the campaign materials and online are aimed at increasing awareness of the real cost of waste and encouraging everyone to take actions to reduce waste.
- The CCGs would like providers of NHS services to support and promote initiatives that are aimed at making the best use of NHS resources and to ensure that their patients understand the reasons why changes to ordering repeat prescriptions have been made.
- The proposed methods for requesting repeat prescriptions make it quick and easy for patients who use a computer, tablet or smartphone to request their own repeat prescriptions, at a time that suits them. Alternatively patients can request their repeat prescriptions using repeat prescription request slips.

#### 15. What if a patient runs out of their medicines?

The following advice has been issued to general practices:

- Supply a repeat prescription as quickly as you are able to, preferably transmitting it electronically to the patient's nominated pharmacy.

If a prescription cannot be issued in time:

- The patient can request an 'emergency supply' of the medicines from their community pharmacist. The pharmacist will need to interview the patient and be satisfied there is an immediate need for the prescription only medicine and that it is not practical for the patient to obtain a prescription. Any medicines supplied will be a private transaction and the pharmacist may charge for the cost of the medicines and a dispensing fee. Emergency supplies cannot be made for controlled drugs Schedule 1, 2 and 3 (except phenobarbitone or phenobarbitone sodium for epilepsy).
- The prescriber can request a pharmacy to make an 'emergency supply' to a patient. The pharmacist will need to be satisfied that the prescriber is unable to provide a prescription immediately due to an emergency (e.g. patient cannot collect the prescription from the prescriber, the prescriber is unable to get the prescription to the pharmacy, and the patient urgently needs the medicine). The prescriber will need to agree to provide the pharmacy with a prescription within 72 hours. Emergency supplies cannot be requested for controlled drugs Schedule 1, 2 and 3 (except phenobarbitone or phenobarbitone sodium for epilepsy).

- The patient can phone NHS 111 which should direct them to a pharmacy that is able to issue an urgent supply of the medicines free of charge on the NHS under the NHS Urgent Medicines Supply Advanced Service (NUMSAS). NHS Prescription charges will apply to any medicines supplied. Emergency supplies cannot be requested for controlled drugs Schedule 1, 2 and 3 (except phenobarbitone or phenobarbitone sodium for epilepsy).

## **16. Do I have to teach patients how to download and use the app required for ordering their repeat prescriptions online using a smartphone? Where should I refer these patients to?**

Patients registered with general practices in Central London, West London, Hammersmith & Fulham, Hounslow and Ealing CCGs can use the SystemOnline app to order their repeat prescriptions and book appointments at the practice.

Patients registered with general practices in Hillingdon, Harrow and Brent CCGs can use the Patient Access app to order their repeat prescriptions and book appointments at the practice.

Pharmacies are not expected to teach patients how to download and use these apps, though you'll be helping them if you do. The apps are fairly intuitive and many people will learn how to use the appropriate app themselves. Instruction guides for using SystemOnline and Patient Access are available at:

SystemOnline: <http://bit.ly/2xtNWg5>

Patient Access: <http://bit.ly/2iDP8en>

## **17. How do I inform a GP practice about patients that I don't think will be able to manage ordering their own repeat prescriptions?**

We are asking general practices and community pharmacists to work together on this initiative. We recommend that pharmacists contact local general practices and agree the most appropriate way to highlight patients who would have difficulty managing ordering their own repeat prescriptions. Your knowledge of patients will be valuable in helping the practices to manage this change.

## **18. What will the practice do if a pharmacy sends through a request for a repeat prescription?**

The practice is likely to contact the patient and ask them to request their repeat prescriptions directly from the general practice. The prescription the pharmacy requested may not be supplied.

## 19. How will the pharmacy know that the patient is now requesting their own repeat prescriptions?

GPs have been asked to tell the patient to inform their community pharmacy that from now on the patient will be requesting their repeat prescriptions direct from the general practice. Please check with any patients on whose behalf you order prescriptions before submitting the repeat prescription request to the practice.

## 20. What about online pharmacies and appliance contractors?

*Prescribing Wisely* programmes apply to online pharmacies, appliance contractors and community pharmacies alike. The vast majority of patients should request their own repeat prescriptions; most who can't, will have a friend or relative who can request the prescription for them.

## 21. My local general practice is treating some pharmacies differently than others. Do the CCGs support this?

No, the CCGs do not support this. General practices are being encouraged to discuss their approach to *Prescribing Wisely* with their local community pharmacies. If a practice has a complaint about a particular pharmacy they should address this through the usual routes.

## 22. What about patients currently receiving prescriptions via repeat dispensing?

Ensure that the patient is a suitable candidate for receiving repeat dispensing prescriptions.

The [NHS Community Pharmacy Contractual Framework Essential Service – Repeat Dispensing](#) states that:

*“Aim of repeat dispensing is to minimise wastage by reducing the number of medicines and appliances dispensed which are not required by the patient”*

and that:

*“Prior to each dispensing episode the pharmacist will ensure that the patient is taking or using, and is likely to continue to take or use, the medicines or appliances appropriately, and that the patient is not suffering any side effects from the treatment which may suggest the need for a review of treatment. The pharmacist will also check whether the patient’s medication regimen has been altered since the prescriber authorised the repeatable medication and whether there have been any other changes in the patient’s health since that time, which may indicate that the treatment needs to be reviewed by the prescriber.”*

## 23. Should I just tell all patients immediately that I will no longer be ordering repeat medicines for them?

We are asking general practices and community pharmacists to work together on this initiative. You should consider each patient's circumstances and if you are concerned that they may need support to manage the change, then discuss this with the patient and their GP practice.

## **24. How do patients make a complaint?**

The system has been designed to be flexible to minimise cause for complaints.

If patients have questions about these initiatives, please direct them to further information at:

<http://bit.ly/2y8BlxR>

If the patient still wants to complain, please direct them to the CCG's complaints team:

- For Brent, Harrow or Hillingdon CCGs contact 020 8966 1106 or [bhhcomplaints@nhs.net](mailto:bhhcomplaints@nhs.net)
- For Central London, Ealing, Hammersmith and Fulham, Hounslow or West London CCGs contact 020 3350 4567 or [cwhh.complaints@nhs.net](mailto:cwhh.complaints@nhs.net)

## **25. How do I obtain more copies of the leaflet**

### **“Repeat prescriptions – Requesting your repeat prescriptions”**

To request more copies of the leaflet on repeat prescriptions, please email [media@nw.london.nhs.uk](mailto:media@nw.london.nhs.uk) .