

Medicines for Self Care Policy

Background

NHS Mansfield & Ashfield and Newark & Sherwood CCGs support individuals purchasing medicines and products from local pharmacies for the treatment of minor ailments as part of self-care. Many treatments for minor illnesses are more expensive when they are provided on an NHS prescription compared to the purchase price from pharmacies and supermarkets.

Local pharmacies are ideally placed to support individuals with advice for the treatment of minor illnesses. There is no need for an appointment, they stock a wide range of inexpensive treatments and many pharmacies are open long hours over seven days a week. The 'Pharmacy First' service is now available in most local Community Pharmacies. 'Pharmacy First' means patients who receive free prescriptions can get free Over-The-Counter (OTC) treatment for common minor illnesses, such as fever, head lice and hay fever.

As a result, prescribers are recommended not to write a prescription for OTC treatments and products, except in the case of chronic conditions.

Self-care is extremely important to a person's health and wellbeing as it makes sure individuals have control over their health, improving quality of life and improving disease outcomes (1). Medicine for self-care is a central part of this approach, and many GP practices already encourage patients to take a personalised approach to keeping themselves healthy, including getting advice from the local Community Pharmacy.

Currently around 20% of GP time and 40% of their total consultations are used for these common minor conditions that could be treated without seeing a GP. Individuals that care for themselves have better health and reduced demand for services. This in turn allows more time for health professionals to see patients that require treatment for more complex conditions (1).

Research suggests that health-seeking behaviour is repetitive with the majority of patients choosing to visit a GP if a prescription was issued on the last occasion. This can have an impact on GPs' time and it has been found that GPs who experienced a lack of time in their medical practice issued more prescriptions than those GPs who did not feel a lack of time (2).

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

Policy Statement

As part of its self-care strategy, Mansfield & Ashfield and Newark & Sherwood CCGs do not support the prescription of medicines and treatments for minor, short term conditions where:

- self-care is the most appropriate route
- medicines and treatments are available to buy over the counter

All prescribers within Mansfield & Ashfield and Newark & Sherwood CCGs, including GPs and non-medical prescribers, should not prescribe readily available over-the-counter medicines.

Treatments for Minor Ailments

1. **Appendix One** lists the common minor illnesses that are considered suitable for self-care. This is included as a guide and is not promoted as an exhaustive list.
2. Many minor illnesses are not serious in nature and often can be managed by the individual. Products aimed at treating the symptoms of many of these ailments may not offer value for money. It is expected that patients should routinely be provided with information regarding where they can purchase these products. These products should not be routinely prescribed on NHS prescription.
3. 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. This is particularly the case in self-limiting illness. The range of medicines available increases regularly.
4. The 'Medicines for self-care' policy aims to encourage people to self-care for minor illnesses as the first stage of treatment. The policy does not cover the treatment of long term conditions (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis), or treatment for more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. headaches and migraines that are unresponsive to over the counter medicines). Treatment for complex conditions and treatment that is only available on prescription will continue to be available on the NHS.
5. 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.
6. Prescribers will be required to consider whether the benefit of prescribing a treatment for an individual justifies the expense to the NHS. Such judgments should be based purely on clinical factors and should not be influenced by socio-economic aspects such as the patient's ability to purchase. To consider social and other non-clinical factors automatically introduces inequality and runs contrary to the principles of the NHS in that people with equal need should be treated equally.
7. It is important to check that the OTC medicine is licensed for the desired indication. Requests for the purchase of OTC medicines for unlicensed indications will be refused by community pharmacies.
8. Community pharmacists should not advise patients to request their GP to prescribe medicines available for self-limiting conditions and minor health problems where these are available to purchase.
9. Individuals are expected to be responsible for their own health and the health of their families. Patients are encouraged to make sure that they are prepared for most common winter ailments by keeping a well-stocked medicine cabinet at home.

Remember:

- Always follow the direction on medicine packets and information leaflets
- Never exceed the stated dose
- Always keep medicines out of sight and reach of children

- Keep your medicines in a high and lockable cupboard in a cool, dry place
10. Patients and the public have an increasing range of resources available to them for advice on medicines use e.g. community pharmacists NHS 111, and NHS Choices. The CCGs encourage patients to access advice and purchase the homely remedies that they and their family may need e.g. Calpol.
 11. Many local Pharmacies offer the Pharmacy First service to help people self-care. Pharmacy First is a minor ailments service that is open to people registered with a local GP who are normally exempt from paying prescription charges. It means that those eligible can see a qualified health professional at a pharmacy to provide free advice and treatment for many minor illness.
<http://psnc.org.uk/nottinghamshire-lpc/nhs-england/northmidlands/pharmacy-services/pharmacy-first-scheme/>
 12. Patients who are not eligible for treatment under the 'medicines for self-care' policy may be considered on an individual basis where their GP believes special circumstances exist that warrant deviation from this policy. Individual cases can be reviewed at the CCGs 'special case' panel upon receipt of a completed application from the patient's GP, Consultant or Clinician.

References:

1. Self Care – A Real Choice. Improving Care Improving Lives. Department of Health. Available at:
http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/prod_consum_dh/groups/dh_digitalassets/@dh/@en/documents/digitalasset/dh_4101702.pdf
(Accessed on 16 February 2017)
2. Grol R, Mokkink H, Smits A, et al. Workload and job satisfaction of general practitioners and the quality of patient care. Fam Pract. 1985;2:128–35. [\[PubMed\]](#)

Developed using resources from CCGs around the UK, including Nottingham North and East CCG, Somerset CCG, West Cheshire CCG and Mid Essex CCG

Medicines for Self-care

The following minor illnesses can be treated effectively and safely using over the counter medicines.

Treatments for these conditions are no longer recommended on prescription

aches and pains	athlete's foot
cold sores	colic
constipation	coughs and colds
dandruff	diarrhoea
mild dry skin	ear wax
fungal nail infections	fungal skin infections - ringworm
foods inc. gluten free, sip feeds & soya milks where not clinically required	hayfever and allergies
headache and migraine	head lice
heartburn and indigestion	piles (haemorrhoids)
upset stomach	skin rashes inc. nappy rash
other skin complaints inc. acne, sun protection, birthmarks, facial hair, bruising, tattoos, sweating	sore throat
teething & toothache	threadworm
travel medicines inc. travel sickness	vitamins for prevention and deficiency, complimentary medicines and health supplements not clinically required
varicose veins	vaginal thrush

For further advice on self-care visit: <http://www.selfcareforum.org/>