

Policy to reduce general practice consultations and prescriptions for minor conditions suitable for self care

October 2016

Document Control:

Description		Comment
Title	Policy to reduce general practice consultations and prescriptions for minor conditions suitable for self care	
Document Number		
Author	Medicines Management Team	
Date Created		
Date Last Amended	26 October 2016	
Version	1	
Approved By	Executive Prescribing Committee	
Date Approved	26 October 2016	
Review Date	October 2018	
Responsible Person/Owner	Deputy Head of Prescribing and Medicines Optimisation	
Publish on Public Web Site Y/N?	Y (Central and Eastern Cheshire MMT website)	
Constitutional Document Y/N?	N	
Requires an Equality Impact Assessment Y/N?	Y	

Amendment History:

Version	Date	Comment on Changes
1.0	26.10.16	Document approved at Executive Prescribing Committee

NB. The version of the policy posted on the intranet or internet must be a PDF copy of the approved version.

Document is available at: www.centralandeasterncheshireMMT.nhs.uk

Document Status: This is a controlled document. Whilst this document may be printed the electronic version posted on the intranet is the controlled copy. Any printed copies of the document are not controlled.

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Introduction

NHS Eastern Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS South Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS Vale Royal Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are legally obliged to have in place and publish arrangements for making decisions and adopting policies on whether particular health care interventions and treatments are made available. In making these arrangements the three CCGs (referred to collectively as the Central and Eastern Cheshire CCGs) have had due regard to relevant law and guidance, including their duties under the National Health Service Act 2006, the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the National Health Service Commissioning board and Clinical Commissioning Groups (Responsibilities and Standing Rules) Regulation 2012, and relevant guidance issued by NHS England.

This document is intended to be a statement of such arrangements made by NHS Eastern Cheshire CCG, NHS South Cheshire CCG and NHS Vale Royal CCG and act as a guidance document for clinicians and other prescribers in primary and secondary care. The document will also be made available to patients and the public for reference on the Central and Eastern Cheshire Medicines Management Team website.

CCGs have a duty to secure continuous improvement in the quality of services and patient outcomes, and are also under a duty to exercise their functions effectively, efficiently and economically. Therefore, health benefits must be maximised from the resources available. The success of this policy will depend upon the commitment by GPs and other prescribers to implement the restrictions and through raised public awareness and adoption of self-care approaches for suitable minor conditions.

Within this policy document the eligibility criteria, a list of suitable minor conditions and medicines and policy principles are clearly outlined.

Position Statement

NHS Eastern Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS South Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group and NHS Vale Royal Clinical Commissioning Group expect that patients with minor conditions suitable for self care will buy over-the-counter medicines when it is appropriate to do so. All prescribers within the areas covered by the Central and Eastern Cheshire CCGs, including non-medical prescribers, GPs, out-of-hours and A&E departments, should not prescribe readily available over-the-counter medicines for minor conditions suitable for self care.

Policy principles on the identification of suitable minor conditions and medicines

In the context of this policy, the term “over-the-counter (OTC) medicines” includes any medicine that is available to purchase without a prescription. Some medicines are available to purchase only from registered pharmacy premises under the supervision of a pharmacist (known as Pharmacy [P] medicines), while others are more widely available from a range of retail sales outlets without any professional oversight (known as General Sales List [GSL] medicines).

The following principles have been used when compiling the list of minor conditions for which prescriptions will not be issued, and medicines that the CCG expects patients to buy to self treat the minor conditions:

- the conditions included can be diagnosed without medical help
- the conditions can be treated with OTC medicines or will get better without treatment
- all relevant contraindications and cautions in the product license will apply at the point of sale
- This policy applies only to situations and minor conditions where [NHS Choices](#) recommends self care. For some conditions this will be related to the severity of the condition (e.g. mild acne is included but severe acne requires prescription medicines) and/or to the duration of the condition (for example, a cough that has persisted for more than three weeks requires a medical assessment).

Eligibility and exceptionality

This policy applies to:

- all patients registered with or attending a healthcare appointment at a general practice within Central and Eastern Cheshire
- all patients whether or not they pay for prescriptions
- all prescribers within the Central and Eastern Cheshire area, including non-medical prescribers, GPs, out-of-hours and A&E departments.

Exceptions to the policy may be made where patients lack the necessary competence, capability or freedom to act by virtue of clinical or social circumstances.

Some specific groups have been identified who would not be able to determine whether their condition was suitable for self care, or be able to purchase medicines for self care, as follows.

- People who lack the appropriate level of cognitive capacity (for example patients with learning disability or with conditions such as dementia).
- People who would have difficulty accessing self-care remedies because they are housebound or reside in care homes (residential and/or nursing homes).

- Groups of people who are commonly refused the sale of over-the-counter medicines because of cautions or contraindications in the product license e.g. patients who are pregnant and breastfeeding, young children, frail elderly people and people with long term conditions (LTCs), particularly where these affect the disposition of medicines such as impairment of kidney or liver function.
- Patients with LTCs requiring a medicine for a period of time or in a quantity that is outside the terms of the OTC medicine's product license
- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an OTC product (e.g. loratadine and cetirizine for hay fever) who need a prescription for second-line treatments.

Medicines and minor conditions

The tables within **Appendix A** of this policy show:

- conditions that are considered suitable for self care – in that the condition(s) are self-limiting, and generally do not prevent a person from carrying out their normal functions for more than a short period of time, such as coughs, colds, headaches and indigestion
- medicines that are available to buy in the community to relieve the symptoms of and /or aid in the recovery from minor conditions.

Rationale

Empowering people with the confidence and information to look after themselves – 'self care' – gives people greater control of their health and encourages behaviour that helps prevent ill health in the long-term. In many cases, people can take care of their minor conditions if they are provided with the right information, enabling health care professionals to focus on patients with more serious health concerns.

The majority of people feel comfortable managing everyday minor conditions like coughs and colds themselves, particularly when they feel confident in recognising the symptoms and have successfully treated themselves with OTC medicines before.

Despite people's willingness to self-treat, there are still 57 million GP consultations nationally a year for minor conditions at a total cost to the NHS of £2 billion. These appointments take up an average of one hour a day for every GP.

Research shows that people often abandon self care earlier than they need to, typically seeking the advice of a GP within four to seven days. The main reasons for this are:

- a lack of confidence in understanding the normal progress of symptoms (e.g. a cold can last up to 14 days)
- the perceived severity and duration of symptoms
- seeking reassurance that nothing more serious is wrong

- wanting a prescription for a medicine, even though the same medicine may be available to buy
- seeking treatment for a condition that will get better on its own.

Research suggests that health-seeking behaviour is repetitive, with 62 per cent of patients choosing to visit a GP if a prescription was issued on the last occasion. Conversely, past experience with self-care builds confidence in patients, with 84 per cent choosing to self care for new episodes.

Providing an environment that supports self care has been shown to:

- improve the health and wellbeing of local communities
- raise awareness of and increase access to suitable providers of healthcare advice and support
- reduce avoidable appointments in general practice, thus helping safeguard appointment time for patients with more serious health problems
- reduce avoidable visits to the local emergency departments and appointments with out-of-hours GP services
- reduce NHS expenditure on medicines that can be bought in the community without a prescription, thus helping safeguard local NHS resources for medicines that are only available on prescription, as well as other services.

Expected benefits of implementing this policy

It is estimated that by implementing this policy:

- there will be a reduction in demand for appointments in general practice for minor conditions suitable for self care, releasing capacity for patients with more serious conditions
- there will be a reduction in expenditure on prescriptions for OTC medicines
- there will be a reduction in medicines waste and costs associated with medicines waste
- patients and carers will be better informed about how to manage minor conditions.

Approach to promoting self care for minor conditions

The CCGs recommend information and resources such as those provided by community pharmacies, [NHS Choices](#), [NHS 111](#), and the [CATCH app](#) are promoted to and used by local people and their carers to decide when minor conditions are suitable for self care. Fact sheets are also available from the [Self Care Forum](#). The CCGs recommend that people are supported to be prepared with a well-stocked medicines cabinet to help manage common illnesses.

The CCGs will engage in a programme of communication and engagement, alongside key health and care partners, to encourage patients to manage these conditions without the need for a GP appointment, NHS prescription or visit to an emergency department.

The CCGs will continue to support the delivery and promotion of existing local awareness campaigns linked to self care and appropriate use of resources, such as [Think Pharmacy](#) and [Choose Well](#).

The CCGs also have the responsibility to provide support to healthcare professionals in promoting self care and raising awareness around important health matters. This policy provides guidance to health professionals to support the CCGs' approach to reducing consultations and prescriptions for minor conditions suitable for self care.

Policy review statement

The CCGs will continue to review the impact of the implementation of this policy on patients and health professionals. The policy will be reviewed 2 years from the date of approval, unless feedback requires an earlier review.

Glossary of terms

CATCH app: A health app for parents and carers of children aged 0-5 developed by NHS Eastern Cheshire CCG and NHS South Cheshire and Cheshire East Council. More details can be found at: www.easterncheshireccg.nhs.uk/News/Free-CATCH-app-for-Cheshire-East-parents-launched.htm

Community pharmacy: Community pharmacies dispense and check prescriptions and provide advice on prescribed medicines, treatment of minor conditions and healthy living.

Contraindication: A contraindication is a condition that makes a person unsuitable to receive a particular medicine.

Caution: A caution is a condition that needs consideration before deciding whether a medicine is suitable for a person, sometimes a caution will mean that a person should have a lower or higher dose of a medicine than other people.

General practice: General practitioners (GPs) are doctors who deal with a whole range of health problems. They also provide health education, offer advice on smoking and diet, run clinics, give vaccinations and carry out simple surgical operations. GPs usually work in practices as part of a team, which includes nurses, healthcare assistants, practice managers, receptionists and other staff. Practices also work closely with other healthcare professionals, such as health visitors, midwives, mental health services and social care services.

General sales list (GSL) – a medicine on the General Sales List is deemed suitable for purchase without any medical supervision.

NHS Choices: NHS Choices is the UK's biggest health website. See www.nhs.uk

NHS 111: NHS 111 is the NHS non-emergency number. Call 111 when you need medical help fast but it's not a 999 emergency.

Non-medical prescribers: A prescriber is a healthcare professional who can write a prescription. A non-medical prescriber is a healthcare professional who can prescribe, who is not a registered doctor or dentist. Only some healthcare professionals can become non-medical prescribers, and they usually have to undertake additional training to become a prescriber. The following groups of healthcare professionals can become prescribers; nurses, pharmacists, optometrists, podiatrists, physiotherapists and diagnostic and therapeutic radiographers.

NSAIDs: non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, an example is ibuprofen.

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Over-the-counter (OTC): Over-the-counter medicines, a general term encompassing both P and GSL medicines.

Primary care; primary care services are health services such as GPs, pharmacists and dentists that people can access directly without a referral from another doctor or service.

P medicines: Pharmacy only medicines that must be sold from registered pharmacy premises under the supervision of a qualified pharmacist.

Appendix A Minor conditions suitable for self care and medicines that are not recommended for prescribing but may be purchased over the counter

Conditions / Situation (check NHS choices for situations when a medical assessment would be appropriate)	Examples of medicines that can be purchased (P and GSL presentations) NB This list is not exhaustive	Comments
Minor conditions associated with pain, discomfort and / or fever (e.g. back pain, headache, strains and sprains, period pain)	Paracetamol Oral and topical NSAIDs (e.g. ibuprofen) Combination analgesics (e.g. co-codamol)	GSL sales are limited to packs of 16 (aspirin, paracetamol, ibuprofen); P sales are limited to packs of 32 (aspirin and paracetamol) or 96 (ibuprofen)
Heartburn and indigestion	Antacids (e.g. alginates, hydrotalcite, aluminium and magnesium antacids) Simeticone/dimeticone H2 Receptor antagonists (e.g. ranitidine) Proton pump inhibitors (e.g. omeprazole, pantoprazole, esomeprazole)	Many antacids aren't recommended for children under the age of 12 and people with certain health conditions, such as kidney disease.
Constipation and haemorrhoids	Bulking agents (e.g. ispaghula) Osmotic laxatives (e.g. lactulose, macrogols) Stimulant laxatives (e.g. bisacodyl, glycerol suppositories, senna) Pile remedies (e.g. bismuth salts, bismuth salts + steroids, topical anaesthetic creams and ointments)	
Diarrhoea and Vomiting	Rehydration sachets Antidiarrhoeals (e.g. loperamide)	
Coughs, colds and sore throats	Cough mixtures; demulcents, expectorants (e.g. guaifenesin) Cough suppressants (e.g. dextromethorphan) Soothing throat lozenges and sprays (e.g. local antiseptics, anti-inflammatories and anaesthetics) Cough and cold remedies containing analgesics	General measures such as keeping warm, resting, taking a painkiller (e.g. paracetamol) and drinking plenty of fluids are usually sufficient

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Acute Nasal Congestion	Nasal sprays / drops (e.g. beclometasone) Decongestants (e.g. pseudoephedrine) Sympathomimetics (e.g. xylometazoline, oxymetazoline)	
Allergies, insect bites/stings	Antihistamines (e.g. loratadine, cetirizine, chlorphenamine, acrivastine) Eye drops (e.g. sodium cromoglycate) Nasal sprays (e.g. beclometasone, fluticasone propionate , triamcinolone acetonide, azelastine hydrochloride) Creams and lotions (e.g. hydrocortisone, crotamiton, mepyramine maleate)	
Dry skin, rash and sunburn	Emollient creams, ointments and lotions Sunscreens After-sun products Bath / shower products Products for cradle cap and nappy rash	Many sunscreens are not prescribable on the NHS (Drug Tariff Part XVIII A).
Acne	Washes, creams and gels (e.g. benzoyl peroxide, potassium hydroxy-quinoline sulfate, nicotinamide)	
Cold sores	Creams and barrier products (e.g. aciclovir cream)	
Head lice	Combs and bug busting kits Lotions (e.g. malathion, permethrin, dimeticone)	
Maintenance of good health	Vitamin and mineral supplements Tonics and sleeping aids Mouthwashes/ sprays Eye cleansing products Nutritional supplements Probiotics Herbal and homeopathic remedies Ear wax remedies	Some vitamins, minerals and nutritional supplements are available on prescription for patients with known deficiencies / long term conditions