
Report to Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Over The Counter Medicines Review

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Purpose of the Report

To make the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee aware of the Over the Counter Medicines Review and the related public engagement work designed to communicate and engage with the public on the proposed changes. To invite the Sub-Committee to participate in the engagement work and consider the questions being asked of the public as per the engagement survey.

Executive Summary

On 29th March 2018, NHS England issued guidance to CCGs describing two drugs of limited clinical value and 35 conditions which may be self-limiting and therefore suitable for patient self-care. Key aspects are encouraging self-care, stopping prescribing of drugs of limited clinical effectiveness and, where drugs are available over the counter for the treatment of minor conditions, these should not routinely be prescribed. This guidance is condition-based, see Appendix 1. Supporting people to self-manage common conditions such as coughs and colds could help reduce England's 57 million GP consultations each year for minor ailments, a situation which costs the NHS approximately £2 billion and takes up to an hour a day on average for every GP.

Promoting the concept of self-care and increasing the awareness that there are alternatives to making GP appointments, or attendance at OOHs or A&E departments with minor conditions, will encourage patients to explore self-care in the future, so changing the culture of dependency in the NHS. GM Clinical Standards Board previously adopted Self-care as a priority area.

NHS Oldham CCG is working with Stockport, Bury, Trafford, Manchester and Wigan CCGs who are all at a similar stage in the process with this piece of work. More information about the OTC engagement work we are doing can be found [on our website](#). The full NHS guidance is attached.

The CCG wants the views of local patients, the public and other stakeholders on the NHS England proposals before deciding whether and how to remove these products from routine prescriptions locally.

We have asked participants to read the supporting information and then complete our survey so that we can make an informed decision based on the views of patients, public and local communities.

1 Introduction

In 2016/17, NHS Oldham CCG spent £2.2m on medicines that are available to purchase over-the-counter (OTC) in pharmacies. It is recognised that much of this cost is attributable to long-term or complex conditions, but considerable spend is also for conditions that may be considered suitable for self-care.

Removing medications for certain conditions from routine prescription would release money to treat conditions such as heart disease and diabetes and help ensure the financial sustainability of the health economy. Medications suggested for stopping routine prescription are for conditions that:

- may be considered to be self-limiting, so they do not need treatment as they will get better of their own accord, or
- are suitable for self-care, so that the person suffering does not normally need to seek medical advice and can manage the condition by purchasing OTC items directly

Table 1 in appendix 1 lists examples of the items that fall into the above categories.

It is also true that some products available at NHS expense have limited evidence of benefit. Removing these products from prescription would also release money.

This policy was written following a GM-wide public consultation and is in line with the guidance from NHS England (appendix 2)

The CCG is seeking the views of local patients, the public and other stakeholders on the NHS England proposals before taking any further decision or making any recommendations on whether to remove these products from routine prescriptions locally.

We have asked participants to take the time to read the supporting information and then complete our survey so that we can make an informed decision based on the views of patients, public and local communities.

An easy read version of the survey is also available.

More information about the OTC engagement work we are doing can be found on our website. The full NHS guidance is attached.

2 Background

People in Oldham are being asked to give their views on the recommendation by NHS England to change how some medicines are routinely prescribed.

Last year NHS England completed a national consultation that looked at 33 routinely prescribed treatments that have limited clinical value or for conditions which will eventually get better of their own accord. On average the NHS spends around £569 million a year on these treatments.

NHS England issued guidance following the consultation that is underpinned by the following principles:

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- Encouraging people to take care of themselves and their families
 - Stopping the prescription of drugs which have limited clinical effectiveness
 - Reducing the prescription of drugs available over the counter for the treatment of minor conditions such as coughs and colds

Each year, NHS Oldham CCG spends a significant amount of money on medicines that are available to purchase over-the-counter. Some of this cost relates to prescriptions for patients who have long-term or complex conditions, but a considerable portion is also spent on minor conditions that may be considered suitable for self-care.

People with minor ailments can often seek the right care and treatment after being signposted to community pharmacies, or local supermarkets and shops, where they can purchase over-the-counter treatments.

Pharmacists have a wealth of experience and training, particularly when it comes to treating minor ailments and no appointment is needed. Local pharmacies are also often open for longer hours than GP Practices, giving people an alternative to waiting for a doctor's appointment when they may not really need one.

We want people in our communities to remain healthy for longer and by supporting them to adopt healthier lifestyles and self-manage common conditions and minor ailments. We aim to keep them well at home, avoiding unnecessary GP appointments and preventing admissions to hospital wherever possible.

Appointments and subsequent prescribing for minor ailments take up around an hour of every GP's time each day. Nationally the cost to the NHS for this work amounts to £2billion every year, so by helping our local communities to self-manage common conditions, this could free up more time for patients who are in real need of clinical treatment. It could also potentially help the NHS reinvest money to treat more serious conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

The types of medications referred to in the guidance include paracetamol, which costs as little as 19p for 16 tablets. However, we are acutely aware that some individuals and families are unable to afford to pay for medication and as health professionals, we want to retain the power to prescribe from the list of recommended treatments as and when appropriate.

The total expected savings from this work is £350K over two years, of which £100K has already been materialised in 2018/19 and £250K is forecast in 2019/20.

The CCG wants the views of local patients, the public and other stakeholders on the NHS England proposals before taking any further decision on whether to remove these products from routine prescriptions locally.

The public are asked to take the time to read the supporting information and then complete our survey so that we can make an informed decision based on the views of patients, public and local communities. An easy read version of the survey is also available.

More information about the OTC engagement work we are doing can be found on our website. The full NHS guidance is attached.

3 Current Position

The CCG has taken into consideration the GM and NHSE consultation work, recommendations and guidance and has begun work to engage with the public of Oldham. So far we have received around 30 responses to the survey, the majority of which support the recommendations. This engagement period will last until 1 April when the survey responses will be reviewed at Clinical Committee and a decision will be made here or it may be escalated to the NHS Oldham CCG Commissioning Committee.

4 Key Issues for Health Scrutiny to Discuss

We would ask the committee to help inform the outcomes of this review by considering the questions asked in the public survey and sharing any other thoughts with us on this matter.

5 Key Questions for Health Scrutiny to Consider

- 5.1 Does the committee support the principle that the local NHS should not routinely prescribe for conditions which are self-limiting or deemed suitable for self-care.
- 5.2 What mitigating steps might the CCG put in place to reduce the impact upon individuals and families who are unable to afford to pay for medication

6 Additional Supporting Information

The CCG has created and delivered a PR campaign to promote the engagement piece, with coverage across social and online: <https://www.oldham-chronicle.co.uk/news-features/153/lifestyle-health/126438/oldhamers-asked-their-opinion-on-changes-to-prescription-medicine>

7 Consultation

The Greater Manchester Shared Services Medicines Optimisation team has played a key role in this work to date, providing up to date insight and data which we have used to inform the engagement work that has been done so far.

The Oldham Medicines Optimisation Lead has also worked closely with his peer at NHS Stockport CCG who is leading on this work from a GM perspective. A paper went to NHS Oldham CCG's Clinical Committee in January 2019 in support of this engagement work, and we have since worked with Communications & Engagement leads at Wigan, Manchester, Stockport, Tameside & Glossop, Bury and Trafford to understand how they are approaching the matter.

We have aligned our work with these teams to ensure an equitable, inclusive approach to this piece of engagement. We will work with the lead at GM and our communications colleagues to develop a framework to support GPs with this work as well as supporting with patient engagement, to include things like a support pack for GPs including the social vulnerability framework, support materials for pharmacies to safety net and identify red flags and support materials for care settings e.g. care homes, schools/nurseries to support the use of OTC meds.

8 Appendices

- Appendix 1: Conditions for which prescribing should be restricted and examples of medicines that can be purchased over-the-counter for the treatment of self-limiting conditions and those conditions deemed suitable for self-care.
- Appendix 2: Policy
- Appendix 3: OTC Expenditure by CCG
- Appendix 4: OTC Guidance for CCGs from NHS England
- Appendix 5: EA Policy Template OTC
- Appendix 6: OTC Questionnaire
- Appendix 7: OTC Easy Read version
- Appendix 8: OTC Engagement Easy Read