

24 March 2020

Dear GP Prescribing Leads,

Urgent advice for GP practices: Please take action now to prevent further medicine supply issues

Firstly, thank you for all the work you and your teams are doing to support us all during these unprecedented times. However as a system we need your support to keep our medicines supply chain going and enable all our patients to be able to obtain the medicines they need to keep them well over these coming months.

The CCG Medicines Optimisation Team have already shared comms. requesting that practices only issues 28 day prescriptions, either via electronic repeat dispensing, or through the use of post-dated prescriptions. We are aware that in some areas of the county this is not happening and patients are presenting at pharmacies with prescriptions for 56 and sometimes 84 days' supply, or presenting multiple prescriptions at one time with the same dispensing date. It was reported yesterday that a pharmacy had received a prescription for numerous inhalers which would keep the patient in stock for over 4 months. As a system the number of prescriptions for inhalers specifically has increased FOUR fold. **This must stop as the Community Pharmacists, Dispensing Doctors and the medicines supply chain cannot meet this increase in demand. Please ensure patients have the medicines they need but only in the quantities recommended. Patients do not need to stock pile. There will be enough medication available in the system for all if we act now.**

As of yesterday, as a system we were faced with significant supply issues (for example inhalers, paracetamol and other critical medicines) which were not due to medicines being out of stock and manufacturing concerns, but due solely to the increased demand. This is putting further pressures on Community Pharmacies and Dispensing Doctors who are already stretched to capacity. The Government last night introduced stricter controls on movement, patients having to return to pharmacies multiple times where medicines are unavailable due to increased demand is not supporting this approach and will impact on the NHS further.

Just like General Practice and our colleagues in the Trusts, the community pharmacy network is supporting additional demands on their services, whilst managing supply and staffing issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please note some community pharmacy teams, under normal circumstances, consist of only one or two members.

I hope it goes without saying, Dispensing Doctor practices shouldn't be routinely diverting their dispensing patients to community pharmacies during COVID-19 pandemic. **It is imperative that if you are experiencing any urgent issues that are compromising your GP practice dispensary services e.g. due to drug shortages or stock issues, lack of staff and any other, then please communicate with us and we can work together to support.** CAPCCG.prescribingpartnership@nhs.net

The local health system needs practices to follow the advice below:

- **28 days prescribing interval and Electronic Repeat Dispensing (eRD)**

During the COVID- 19 pandemic, practices must implement only 28 days prescribing intervals and consider using electronic repeat dispensing for all clinically appropriate patients, to ensure safe prescribing whilst maintaining patients' access to medications. If you need support with this process please contact the Medicines Optimisation Team CAPCCG.prescribingpartnership@nhs.net

Alternatively post-dated prescriptions could be issued where clinically appropriate. Please post-date each prescription for 1 week prior to the patient running out. Please do not issue more than one prescription with the same date as patients can legally request that all are dispensed on the same day which will not support the medicines supply chain.

- **Inhaler prescribing**

We are still receiving reports from Community Pharmacy colleagues that they are seeing an exceptional increase in the number of patients presenting prescriptions for inhalers (FOUR fold increase). In some instances, the patients concerned have not requested these on prescription for many years and actually may no longer require this treatment. **We need our prescribers to think very carefully about whether there is a continued need for these inhalers when requested and also consider taking the following actions urgently:**

- Where an inhaler is requested, particularly for patients who have not requested on repeat for a long period of time, **please consider if it is needed and clinically essential before prescribing**
- If the inhaler is deemed necessary please **prescribe only ONE inhaler at a time**. Consider using eRD or post-dated prescription where the inhaler is used regularly and only for the prescribing interval deemed appropriate based on the dose prescribed and the number of actuations in the inhaler.

If you need any support with anything medicines related our Medicines Optimisation Team should be contacted and they will support you CAPCCG.prescribingpartnership@nhs.net

Thank you for your support.



Dr Gary Howsam

CCG Clinical Chair