

Prescribing and Medicines Optimisation Guidance

Issue: 55

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1. NHS England: Optimising blood testing in primary and secondary care (16TH Sept 2021) ([Link](#))

These documents include guidance developed by an expert Clinical Reference Group that are specific to the acute shortage situation, as well as best practice guidance that is generally applicable day-to-day, both of which will be updated in response to developments.

2. Public Health England: COVID-19 chapter of green book updated (16th Sept 2021) ([Link](#))

Chapter 14a has been updated to include new recommendations on:

- Boosters and children and young people
- Minor updates to guidance on managing allergies and giving doses after rare side effects
- Clarification of clinical risk groups and use of the clinically extremely vulnerable definition.

3. Specialised Pharmacy Service: Switching between oral morphine and other oral opioids in adult palliative or cancer care patients ([Link](#))

This article provides assistance for switching oral opioids in cancer and palliative care settings. Key points include consulting manufacturer's product information, estimating the new drug dose after calculating the current total daily dose, and consider applying a dose reduction.

4. DHSC : Overprescribing review (22nd September 2021) ([Link](#))

The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) have recently published a paper entitled: *Good for you, good for us, good for everybody: A plan to reduce overprescribing to make patient care better and safer, support the NHS, and reduce carbon emissions.*

The review has found that overprescribing is a serious problem in health systems internationally that has grown dramatically over the last 25 years. It has two main causes:

- systemic: key factors are single-condition clinical guidelines, a lack of alternatives to prescribing a medicine, a need for on-going review and

deprescribing to be built into the process of prescribing, inability to access comprehensive patient records, the lack of digital interoperability, and pressure of time

- cultural: a healthcare culture that favours medicines over alternatives and in which some patients struggle to be heard.

As well as the physical and mental impact on patients, overprescribing can lead to more hospital visits and preventable admissions, even premature deaths. There is also the cost in wasted medicines. Overprescribing may disproportionately affect Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and those who are more vulnerable, such as the elderly and those with disabilities. Evidence is limited, but the review estimates that it is possible that at least 10% of the total number of prescription items in primary care need not have been issued.

Overprescribing may be reduced by shared decision-making with patients; better guidance and support for clinicians; more alternatives to medicines, such as physical and social activities and talking therapies; and more Structured Medication Reviews (SMR) for those with long-term health conditions.

The NHS Long Term Plan is addressing many of the system problems already, such as improving digital systems, funding more pharmacists in primary care networks (PCNs) to perform Structured Medication Reviews and introducing personalised care for patients. Initiatives such as Rethinking Medicine have set out the cultural change in medicine that needs to be developed and spread.

To achieve a substantial reduction in overprescribing, there needs to be a comprehensive and proactive strategy to co-ordinate and drive the recommendations of this review. The review therefore proposes:

- systemic changes to improve patient records, transfers of care and clinical guidance to support more patient-centred care
- culture change to reduce the reliance on medicines and support shared decision-making
- a new National Clinical Director for Prescribing to lead a cross-system implementation programme including research and training

The review proposes to reconvene within a year of publication to assess progress.

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Previous bulletins can be found at: <https://gp-portal.westhampshireccg.nhs.uk/medicines/covid-19-medicines-information/covid-19-medicines-optimisation-bulletins/>