

Guidelines on Prescribing of Medicines that are Available for Purchase (Self-Care) Paracetamol and Ibuprofen

This guideline aims to restrict the prescribing of Paracetamol and Ibuprofen products for short term use that can be bought at a reasonable cost over the counter. If this guideline is followed it will result in:

- ✓ Reduced patient reliance on prescribers for prescriptions.
- ✓ Reduced consultations for minor, self-limiting conditions.
- ✓ Increased patient self-reliance for minor conditions.

Funding of medicines available to purchase to treat self-limiting conditions and minor ailments and self-care is a personal responsibility.

It is expected that patients will purchase such medicines, after seeking appropriate advice from a community pharmacist or other healthcare professional.

All patients, regardless of where they live, should be able to access and purchase such medicines. There is a range of resources for advice on medicines use, e.g. community pharmacists, NHS 111, which can be used to enable self-care before seeking advice from a GP or a Nurse.

Medicines can be purchased over the counter (OTC) from community pharmacies and/or supermarkets. These often have extended opening times therefore allowing rapid access and early treatment, rather than delaying treatment by attending a GP appointment for a prescription.

Many minor ailments are not of a serious nature and will resolve within a short time-frame without the need for treatment. Community Pharmacists are able to advise and signpost patients in situations where they should seek medical advice.

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.

If patients are regularly using OTC medicines for a long term condition e.g. Regular full dose paracetamol for chronic pain, it would not be unreasonable to prescribe.

Paracetamol costs over four times as much to the NHS compared with the over the counter therefore providing paracetamol on prescription for short term use is not a good use of NHS resources

Note: The recommendations in this document should not replace clinical judgement as the decision to prescribe remains with the individual prescriber. There will be circumstances when it may be appropriate to prescribe these medicines. Under the NHS regulations GPs should prescribe any drugs that he or she feels are needed for a patient's medical care. A patient is entitled to drugs that the GP believes are necessary, not those which the patient feels should be prescribed¹.

1. British Medical Association. Prescribing in General Practice. June 2015.
<https://www.bma.org.uk/advice/employment/gp-practices/service-provision/prescribing/prescribing-and-dispensing>

Adapted from Bristol CCG and 'Charlotte Keel Medical Practice Prescribing Restriction Policy and Mid Essex CCG Policy on Prescribing of Medicines that are Available for Purchase (Self-Care).

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