

To: GP practice managers for internal practice dissemination
Community pharmacies

Date: 25th March 2019

Re: **Managing medicines shortages**

Dear Colleagues

The supply of medicines to dispensing contractors across the UK has been subject to significant pressures in recent months, presenting challenges for all involved in the prescribing and dispensing system as well as concern for patients, carers and other healthcare professionals. In partnership, the LMC, CPNY and the CCGs have developed and agreed procedures to help manage such circumstances locally as effectively as possible. In the interests of our population we urge all parties to collaborate to minimise disruption and change. Maintaining positive professional relationships will be invaluable in helping to manage pressures.

Prescribing and Dispensing

Staff working in general practice and community pharmacy are increasingly facing considerable challenges to successfully provide patients with their prescribed items. For some, this requires dispensing contractors to purchase items at prices above the NHS Drug Tariff costs in the expectation that existing national processes will appropriately recompense them for a more expensive product. The agreed system for contractors to report such price variance is through PSNC, which will allow these circumstances to be understood and managed centrally via the price concession (NCSO) model. Dispensing contractors should not refuse to obtain and dispense an item because of a discrepancy between purchase and NHS listed reimbursement prices (Drug Tariff or NCSO). Such action is not in the best interests of the patient, and could be contrary to NHS contracts and accepted best practice as supported by CPNY and YORLMC.

It is preferable that the patient receives the treatment prescribed for them rather than look to change to an alternative drug. All colleagues should be assured that dispensing staff are following the guidance described in appendix 1 before advising the prescriber and patient that the item will not be available in time.

Community pharmacists are well placed to liaise with GPs if there is no stock available to match the prescribed item and there is a pressing need for an alternative. Patients should be reassured of effective communication between the pharmacy and their GP surgery and should be kept up to date with the progression of their medication supply issue as appropriate and practical. Advice to prescribers and practice staff is described in appendix 2.

Advice for patients

Patients and carers can assist in avoiding national shortages in medicines supply; the advice described in appendix 3 should be helpful. Patient information will be hosted on the national nhs.uk website as it becomes available.

A PSNC factsheet at <https://psnc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PSNC-Patient-Leaflet.pdf> may also be helpful for patients.

Further links can be found on the PSNC, DDA and CCG websites.

Kind Regards

Medicines Management team,
North Yorkshire and York CCGs

YORLMC

CPNY

Appendix 1

Managing medicines supply problems: advice for dispensing contractors

It is preferable that the patient receives the treatment prescribed for them rather than look to change to an alternative drug. All colleagues should be assured that dispensing staff are following the guidance* below before advising the prescriber and patient that the item will not be available in time:

Dispensers:

- In addition to below, staff should be familiar with their employer's standard operating procedures (SOPs) for owing items and sourcing stock
- Check if all pack sizes and brands of the medication are out of stock with all wholesalers (not just your usual wholesaler(s)). Take note of alternative strengths that are in stock.
- Phone wholesalers to ask when they expect to receive stock and also to ask if they are aware of alternative stock that your ordering system did not attempt to order.
- Contact nearby pharmacies to ask if they have stock available or can obtain it:
 - If they do have stock, and the patient is waiting, ask the patient if they would prefer to take their prescription to that pharmacy, or prefer to wait until you obtain stock (potentially from the other pharmacy).
 - Parties should be aware of wholesaling regulations and exceptions as well as any statement of the MHRA's intentions during a specified period of shortages.
- If the item is only marketed by a single manufacturer then contact them and ask when it will be back in stock with wholesalers. If the manufacturer is holding stock then they may wholesale directly to the contractor to meet the urgent needs of a specific patient. For further information see <https://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/supply-chain/manufacturer-contingency-arrangements/>
- If the steps above are unsuccessful, make the patient aware and ask if they would like their prescription returned to them, or whether they would like you to contact the GP to discuss options:
 - In some cases, a patient may prefer to wait if the medication is not required urgently. Assess the urgency by asking what supply they already have.
 - If agreed, then advise practice colleagues of the circumstances, your efforts and findings, including when the item will be back in stock and possible alternatives that are available.
- If an alternative is prescribed, the dispensing contractor should ensure adequate counselling has been given to the patient. There is an increased risk of medication errors in patients when their medicines are being changed, particularly if they have not received appropriate counselling. It is important to ensure community pharmacists are satisfied the patient understands the change in their medication and how it may be taken differently to their previous medicine. The community pharmacy may wish to offer a New Medicine Service intervention if appropriate.

* These guidelines are based on guidance issued by NHS England, DHSC and PSNC.

Appendix 2

Managing medicines supply problems: advice for prescribers and practice staff

- If possible please provide local community pharmacies with a key contact or direct telephone number to call the practice to discuss alternative options for medicines that are in short supply. This will help avoid significant delay and queuing for health professionals that are acting in the best interests of our patients.
- Please do not exceed normal prescribing quantities and consider reviewing historical prescription quantities for supplies that would cover an unnecessarily long period of time.
- If a community pharmacy contacts a GP surgery then the practice should look to understand the following:
 - How urgent is the item for the patient?
 - Is an item of that description not available from any wholesaler?
 - Have other pharmacies in the locality confirmed the same?
 - When is the item expected to be in stock? Please note that dates from wholesalers are a guide and will not always be accurate.
 - What alternatives are available to the pharmacy (or other pharmacies)?
 - Prescribe any alternative in line with formulary and relevant guidance but also consider other imminent stock pressures. Do not prescribe excessive quantities, especially of a new drug.
 - Arrange prescription collection, either by the patient/pharmacy from the practice or via EPS.
 - During liaison with the patient, the prescriber (or appropriate healthcare professional) should ensure the patient understands all that is changing within their medicines regime. There is increased risk of medication errors when medicines are being changed, particularly if they have not received appropriate counselling. It is important the practitioner is satisfied the patient understands the changes involved and how it may be taken differently to their old medicine.

Appendix 3

Managing medicines supply problems: advice for patients and carers

A PSNC factsheet at <https://psnc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/PSNC-Patient-Leaflet.pdf> may also be helpful for patients.

Patients and carers can assist in avoiding national shortages in medicines supply. The following points should be helpful in discussions with patients:

- Do not stockpile or try to stockpile medication. Statements from the Department of Health and Social Care are that this is not necessary and will cause further disruption to the supply chain.
- Reducing waste helps reduce the impact of national shortages. Please help to avoid wasting medicines by not over-ordering or keeping too many weeks supply at any time.
- Ensure repeat medicines are ordered with appropriate promptness, neither too far in advance, nor when you're about to run out. Typically 7-10 days in advance of needing further supply will provide ample time for your prescription to be produced and for it to be dispensed, including resolving any potential supply issues. If unsure then speak to GP practice and pharmacy staff about when you should place an order for your next repeat prescription.
- Only order the items you will need for the next month. Always check your existing medicine supply before placing your order. Do not order items if you already have sufficient supply. Online ordering direct from your GP surgery is a very practical way to do this (if it is an option to you).
- If your medicine has been changed, speak to your pharmacist to ensure you have a good understanding of how to use the medicine, how it is different to your previous medicine, and when you should start taking this medicine.
- Please be assured that the government is working with pharmaceutical companies, suppliers and the NHS to make sure medicines are available.