

Medicines Management Prescribing Focus – September 2020

Self-care and Over the Counter (OTC) Medicines for Minor Conditions

For the September prescribing focus, the Medicines Management Team in North Yorkshire would like practices to refocus on self-care and the purchase of OTC medicines for minor conditions.

Prior to 1st April 2020, North Yorkshire CCGs had been developing a campaign on self-care and the purchase of OTC medicines for minor conditions campaign. This was in line with a national campaign supporting the NHS in increasing efforts to encourage patients to apply self-care for minor ailments.

Understandably, Covid-19 put this campaign on hold, but with a return towards 'business as usual', North Yorkshire CCG plans to revisit and launch a local campaign on self-care and OTC medicines for minor conditions for patients who are not shielding or self-isolating due to Covid-19. It is expected that this will help reduce demand for GP appointments and enable practice colleagues to dedicate more of their valuable time to higher risk patients.

It should be noted that further to publication of NHS guidance on this subject, Professor Stephen Powis (National Medical Director, NHSE) issued a letter to GPs to provide reassurance that the commissioner will not find practices in breach of the GP contract if they follow the CCG guidance on routine prescribing of OTC items: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/medicines-2/conditions-for-which-over-the-counter-items-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed/>

Across North Yorkshire CCG, the NHS drug spend on prescribed items that could be purchased is £4.0M per annum. We estimate that **£1.6M of this could be avoided** each year by increased adoption of self-care. North Yorkshire CCG asks all GP practices to apply our self-care program consistent with national guidance, www.prescriptionchanges.co.uk, through the following actions:

- **not prescribing for self-limiting conditions**
- **declining requests for items suitable for self-care and**
- **avoiding items with poor evidence of clinical benefit.**

How much does your practice spend on prescribing self-care items compared with other practices in North Yorkshire? **See bar chart at appendix 2.**

Requested Actions for GP Practices

- **Nominate a Self-Care Champion for your practice**, perhaps a prescription clerk, receptionist or similar. The self-care champion should support other staff to signpost patients to self-care. Please inform stacey.stanton@nhs.net of your nominated Self-Care Champion (and a contact email address), who we will liaise with going forward with the Self-Care campaign. Please action by close of play on Friday 16th October 2020.
- **Engage all members of practice staff** in promoting self-care. It is vital that everyone is involved, especially reception staff, prescribers and dispensary teams.
- **Signpost patients** to use their community pharmacy for advice on self-care. There are recommended exceptions to this and for consistency we ask that all are familiar with those. **See exceptions in appendix 1.**
- **Share self-care messages and follow our social media platforms.** See resources.
- **Promote Think Pharmacy!, the NHS App and NHS 111** across social media platforms and in practice. See resources.

Objectives and Advantages for Promoting Self-Care

- Change behaviour/culture around the dependency on the NHS and requesting medications on prescriptions of limited clinical value or that can be bought over-the-counter for self-care
- Increase patient independence, encouraging and empowering to take care of their own health and to buy rather than request a prescription
- Make use of local, accessible and convenient services within a nationwide campaign
- Better use of NHS resources as patients receive more information, choice and control over their lives and health resulting in decrease in unnecessary attendance at A&E etc.
- **Improve availability of GP appointments** by reducing those taken up for minor illness
- **More GP time for patients** by helping to control increasing demands on GP time
- **Increase awareness of allied healthcare professionals** and their roles
- Reduce pressure on NHS prescribing budgets.

Helpful Resources for GP Practices

Resources, including some of those described below, will increasingly be available on the CCG website at: <https://www.northyorkshireccg.nhs.uk/home/lifestyle-self-care/>

Self-care and Over-the-counter Items: A Quick Reference Guide* (see website)

NHSE published guidance in March 2018 on conditions for which over-the-counter (OTC) items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care. This listed 35 conditions, probiotics, vitamins and minerals as areas where self-care may be more appropriate. Around the time of its publication, a quick reference guide was developed to assist clinicians with appropriately encouraging people to self-care for minor illnesses as the first stage of treatment. It is envisaged that in most cases (unless specified) these minor conditions will clear up with appropriate self-care. If symptoms are not improving or responding to treatment, patients should be encouraged to seek further advice.

This guide mentions some widely recognised brands to assist prescribers in advising patients, but generics may be available and at a lower retail price. Some brands have been included as they have specific product licences. It should also be noted that some products cannot be bought over the counter for certain purposes such as use in certain age groups or the affected site of the body. A reduced version of these limitations to usage will be issued soon.

Use of this guide should aid prescribers when making clinical decisions with their patients and also reduce the frequency of pharmacies redirecting patients back to their GP.

No Prescription Required Letter (see website)

This locally adopted leaflet is available electronically to issue to patients, including via AccuRx, and will also be printed and issued to practices shortly for use in face to face discussions.

Self-Care Phrases (see attached to email to practices)

This provides a number of phrases that practice colleagues may find useful in conversation with patients. When encouraging patients to self-care it will be helpful to:

- Highlight the positive about access to advice from the local pharmacy
- Change behaviours and expectations that not everything needs to be seen by the GP
- Explain the change happening locally and nationally, including why.

Think Pharmacy!

The CCG is collaborating with Community Pharmacy North Yorkshire (LPC), the Local Medical Council (LMC) and Vale of York CCG to develop a set of key messages and materials to ensure consistency and maximum impact. These will be shared with practices and pharmacies as they

continue to be developed. Patients should ideally see the same materials and messages in their GP surgery, their pharmacy and elsewhere.

Some general messages to use in discussion with patients include:

- *'Your pharmacy team are healthcare experts who can provide clinical advice for minor illnesses such as coughs, colds and tummy troubles'*
- *'If symptoms suggest something more serious, your pharmacy team will help ensure you get the help you need'*
- *'Your pharmacy team provides expert self-care advice and over-the-counter treatments for a wide range of common illnesses; before you visit your GP, Think Pharmacy!'*

Supporting Patients with Self-Care Options

Patients should be encouraged to look (or ask) for the lowest cost version of medicine that is recommended for self-care, which can often be a generic or non-branded product

North Yorkshire CCG Social Media Links

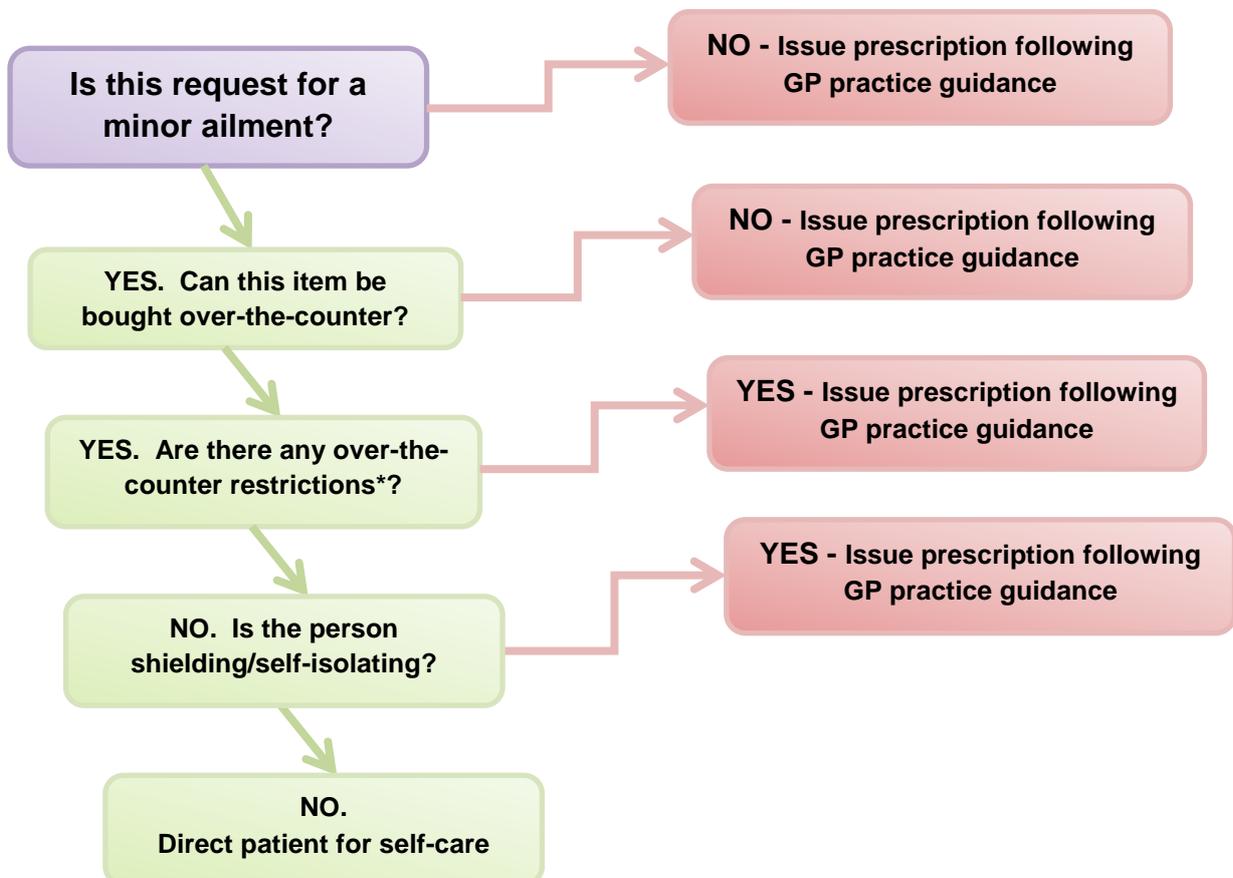
Follow the CCG on social media platforms, sharing key messages on self-care:

Facebook: @NorthYorksCCG <https://www.facebook.com/NorthYorksCCG>

Twitter: @NorthYorks_CCG https://twitter.com/NorthYorks_CCG

Encouraging Patient Self-Care from Practice Level

The flow chart below was included in the Self-Care Topic circulated in February 2020. We include it again as a useful aid for practice staff in managing prescription requests for minor ailments.



NHS App

The NHS App is a simple and secure way to access a range of NHS services on a smartphone or tablet. It can be used by patients to support them in self-care for a wide range of conditions and also allows patients to check symptoms. For more information on the NHS App please visit: <https://digital.nhs.uk/services/nhs-app/prepare-your-practice-for-connection-to-the-nhs-app>

NHS 111

NHS 111 can help if a patient (aged 5 and over only) has an urgent medical problem and they are not sure what to do. They (or their guardian), will be advised accordingly after answering questions about their symptoms on the website <https://111.nhs.uk/> or by calling 111 and speaking to a fully trained adviser on the phone. It is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and support includes the provision of self-care advice.

Calls to the NHS 111 phone service are recorded. A record is kept of all contact with NHS 111 and stored securely. Information is only shared with others directly involved with their care.

The MMT welcomes ideas and suggestions that you and colleagues may wish to recommend.

Many thanks in anticipation

North Yorkshire CCG Medicines Management Team

Appendix 1

General Exceptions to the National Guidance

There are certain scenarios where patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed and these are outlined below:

- Patients prescribed an OTC treatment for a long term condition e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease. This does not include long term conditions which are also classified as minor conditions e.g. mild to moderate hay fever.
- For the treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to over-the-counter medicines.
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor i.e. those with red flag symptoms; for example indigestion with very bad pain.
- Treatment for complex patients e.g. immunosuppressed patients.
- Patients prescribed OTC products to treat an adverse effect or symptom of a more complex illness and/or prescription only medications.
- Patients requiring treatments that are prescription only medicines.
- Circumstances where the product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold over-the-counter to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children and/or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding. In addition, some indications may not allow OTC sale e.g. hydrocortisone cream applied to the face.
- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self-care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an appropriate OTC product.
- Patients where the clinician considers that the presenting symptom is due to a condition that would not be considered a minor condition.
- Circumstances where the prescriber believes that in their clinical judgement, exceptional circumstances exist that warrant deviation from the recommendation to self-care.
- Individual patients where the clinician considers that their ability to self-manage is compromised as a consequence of medical, mental health or significant social vulnerability to the extent that their health and/or wellbeing could be adversely affected, if reliant on self-care. To note that being exempt from paying a prescription charge does not automatically warrant an exception to the guidance.
- Consideration should also be given to safeguarding issues (including, but not limited to, children); particularly if there are concerns that treatment might otherwise not be provided.

Appendix 2

Bar-chart comparing the spend per 1000 Astro PUs on self-care medicines in GP Practices in NY

