The Datchet
Health Centre

Patient Policy 23: Guidance on Prescribing of Medicines Available to Purchase over the counter for minor ailments

Datchet Health Centre will follow the recommendations of the Berkshire East Federated CCG Effective Prescribing Committee. Their policy* (EPC 005) was issued on 8/1/14 and will be reviewed by 8/1/17. They recommend that medicines that can be purchased over the counter (OTC) for short term self-care of self-limiting illness, should be purchased by the patient, parent or carer. This applies to all patients, including those in care homes where an appropriate homely remedy policy should be in place and agreed with primary care.

The NHS Constitution* sets out that patients must take some responsibility for their own health and that of their family. The NHS Constitution* also sets out that patients have responsibility to seek advice from the most appropriate point of care. For minor and self-limiting conditions there are readily available resources for advice on medicines use e.g. community pharmacist, NHS 111, www.nhs.uk, that are intended to support self-care. These resources should be used for short term self-care of minor and self-limiting illness in preference to General Practice. Patients seeking advice on these conditions should be signposted to available resources rather than given an appointment with the GP or nurse.

If a patient has tried self-care for minor ailments and has not had relief of symptoms or recovery then it is appropriate for them to see the GP or nurse. In the case of patients in residential care, it is recommended that GP opinion should be sought after using homely remedies for a maximum of 48 hours without recovery.

It is not appropriate to judge whether an OTC medication can be afforded by the patient. A consistent policy must apply to all.

Primary care has often been asked to issue an NHS prescription because patients have pre-paid prescription certificates, as well as childhood, older age and other exemptions from NHS charges. These are specifically designed to allow patients to obtain supply of NHS prescribed medication and therefore by definition should not be used to obtain supplies of medication available OTC for short-term self-limiting illness, as defined here.

This guidance does not apply to items prescribed when needed for treatment of a specific condition in a patient as part of a general clinical management plan, or to regular clinician initiated treatment for acute illness or long term chronic disease. Having timely access to treatment of minor ailments is a patient, parent or carer responsibility when living in the community. It is the responsibility of the care home for people in residential care.

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This applies, but is not limited to, the following self-limiting short-term conditions:

- Occasional acute pain, such as period pain, and simple acute short spells of headache, backache, earache, tooth ache, and teething
- Management of coughs and colds and simple mouth ulcers and cold sores
- Reducing body temperature
- Treating one-off constipation, diarrhoea and haemorrhoids (piles)
- Treating minor abrasions
- Treatment of dry or irritated skin, nappy rash, mild acne and mild eczema
- Minor allergic responses – minor simple hay fever and minor allergies
- Occurrences of head-lice infestation and thread worms
- Treatment of bouts of dyspepsia resulting from over-indulgence
- Treatment of oral or vaginal thrush
- Treatment of athlete's foot, sweat rash, wart and verruca
- Multi-vitamins and vitamin tablets when used for prevention rather than treatment of disease - this also applies to long term prevention.

Community pharmacists should not advise any patients, relatives or carers to request their GP to prescribe medicines for self-limiting conditions and minor health problems where they are available to purchase OTC. Prescribers are expected to refer to and comply with the East Berkshire Formulary for guidance on choice of therapeutic agent. This can be found at eastberks.formulary.co.uk

There are low priority statements relating to the following medications which should also be borne in mind by prescribers:
Glucosamine - South Central Priorities committee statement 136
Nutritional supplements for ARMD – Thames Valley Priorities Statement 108
Pharmacological interventions in overweight and obesity – SC Priorities statement 142 (Ongoing use only if weight loss achieved)
Terbinafine and other antifungal treatment for fungal nail infection – Thames Valley Statement 74
Probiotics – Berkshire Priorities Committee statement 135

References:
Guidance Berkshire East EPC 005 – Medicines that are available for purchase
Thames Valley Priorities Committee Policy statement 88: Over the counter drugs 12/2006
Policy on prescribing medicines available for purchase Mid Essex Locality March 2011
The NHS Constitution for England March 2013
Individual funding requests NHS South Central and West Commissioning Support Unit: fundingrequests.cscsu.nhs.uk

Policy author: MW (August 2015)
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