

Stakeholder statement

27/2/2017

Outcome of patient engagement: should over the counter medicines be available on prescription for minor illnesses?

Following a six-week engagement campaign, health commissioners in South Nottinghamshire have approved plans to limit prescriptions for over the counter medicines (such as ibuprofen and paracetamol) for minor ailments, coming into effect from Wednesday 1 March 2017.

From the patient's perspective these plans mean that over the counter (OTC) products like paracetamol and antihistamines will no longer be prescribed for short-term, self-limiting conditions. In these instances, patients will be encouraged to buy their own from their local chemist or supermarket.

The three South Nottinghamshire NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (Nottingham North and East, Nottingham West, and Rushcliffe) undertook a six-week patient and stakeholder engagement campaign to ask people whether these medicines should be prescribed for minor ailments, such as a cold, headache, sore throat, hay fever etc.

Rather than visiting their GP, most people can take care of themselves when they have a minor ailment through a combination of self care and OTC medicines, which can be bought in supermarkets, shops or pharmacies.

Currently, GPs can prescribe OTC medicines to patients for minor ailments, but it is significantly more expensive for them to do so. The total cost of prescribing OTC medicines for Nottingham North and East (NNE), Rushcliffe and Nottingham West (NW) CCGs in 2015 was £1,966,265.

The CCGs estimate that by limiting prescriptions for OTC medicines for minor ailments across the three areas, they can deliver a saving of around £196,626.

During the course of the consultation, the CCGs received 403 responses from patients, public and professionals across South Nottinghamshire, and also ran seven public events across the South Nottinghamshire area.

The majority of respondents (87 per cent) said the proposal wouldn't affect their self care of a minor ailment at all. Eighty five percent said it wouldn't affect their access at all and 75 per cent even said it wouldn't even affect their long-term condition.

Where there were concerns, they were particularly focussed on the following issues:

- Vulnerable patients who may not be able to access OTC medicines
- Ensuring patients with long-term conditions can continue to get access to OTC medicines they need to help them manage their condition

In response to this we can confirm, there are no plans to limit medicines for people with long-term conditions and GPs will be able to prescribe in other circumstances of clinical need.

Local GP and Nottingham North and East CCG's Clinical Lead Dr James Hopkinson says: *"Providing small quantities of over the counter medicines on prescription for minor ailments is not an effective use of funds. When these medicines are prescribed, we incur extra charges through dispensing and administrative fees, and if you include GP time then the costs are even higher."*

"We've engaged with patients and we're pleased that they largely support us making these changes."

"Basically what we are saying is that patients should not expect their GP to prescribe these medicines and products going forwards for short term illnesses, unless the GP deems there is a clinical need to do so."

"If the patient finds that their symptoms persist, of course they should then contact their GP Practice and arrange an appointment."

More information can be found at: (insert CCG website link)

For specific queries and comments, please contact the CCG patient experience team on: [0800 028 3693](tel:08000283693) (option 2) or email pet@nottinghamnortheastccg.nhs.uk