Private prescriptions for NHS patients

1. Scope

This document advises health care professionals in Surrey Downs CCG on the circumstances when a private prescription may be offered to an NHS patient.

2. Use of private prescriptions for NHS patients

A private prescription may be offered to an NHS patient where an item is not available on the NHS. Under these circumstances a charge could be levied for the issue of a private prescription. Such circumstances are:

- Drugs on the NHS "Black List" (those listed in Part XVIIA of the Drug Tariff)
- Drugs where the indications is not included in the 'SLS' conditions
- Vaccinations and antimalarials for travellers, or drugs prescribed in anticipation of an ailment for patients travelling abroad (i.e. there is no clinical need at the point of prescribing). Further advice on travel vaccinations that should be prescribed privately can be found on the Surrey PAD.

3. Private prescriptions for a branded product

The BNF recommends that medicines should be prescribed by their non-proprietary (generic) name, with some exceptions. Where the patient requests a branded product, despite local NHS policy being to prescribe generically, the GP can offer to issue the patient with a private prescription, instead of an NHS prescription. It is important to note the following:

- An NHS prescription must be offered to the patient. The NHS GMS terms of service require that an NHS patient be offered an NHS prescription where a treatment is clinically necessary.
- The patient can choose whether to accept the NHS or private prescription. If the private prescription is chosen then this should be clearly documented in the patients notes.
- The private prescription can be written generically and the patient should be informed to request the branded equivalent at the point of dispensing. This negates the need to enter the branded drug onto the patients clinical notes and thus avoid the risk of the branded product accidentally appearing on subsequent NHS prescriptions.
- The patient should be informed that the pharmacist will charge them accordingly.
- A charge should not be made to the patient for writing the private prescription.
• The prescriber must NOT levy a charge for the issue of a private prescription under these circumstances.

4. Private prescriptions to avoid NHS prescription charges

An NHS patient may request a private prescription where the cost of the NHS prescription charge is more than the cost of a private prescription.1 This practice does not contravene any regulations, the implications and limited significant benefits render this inadvisable as a matter of routine. A charge should not be made to the patient for writing a private prescription. The view of the Local Medical Committee (LMC) is as follows:

• The patient must also be offered an NHS prescription and choose which one to accept. There is a view that the patient should not be given both prescriptions as both may be obtained. However, this might cause difficulties at the point of dispensing if costs have changed and the private prescription is going to cost the patient more than the NHS prescription charge.

• Although this may be an attractive option, the practicalities and potential hazards make this difficult to work and therefore inadvisable.

• In circumstances where the purchase price of the drug is less than the NHS prescription charge, any significant cost benefit is often negated by the addition of the pharmacist's dispensing fee.

• It is thought that there are only a limited number of patients prescriptions for whom there would be a tangible benefit, and the time spent explaining the process may also make it an unrealistic option for most consultations.

• If this process were to be used for a number of circumstances, it would be advisable for all of the GPs within the practice to adopt a consistent approach and a patient explanatory letter developed.

Agreed by Surrey Downs GP Prescribing Leads Group: May 2015

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1 The cost of a private prescription will be the cost of the medicine plus additional dispensing costs applied by the dispensing pharmacy.