

Patients in East Leicestershire and Rutland to be asked to buy medicines at pharmacies and supermarkets for common, short term illnesses

October 31, 2016

From 31 October 2016 the majority of patients in East Leicestershire and Rutland will no longer be prescribed medicines by their GP if they are available over the counter at pharmacies and supermarkets. These medicines will include pain killers, cough medicines, hayfever tablets and coldsore treatments.

Some patients will be exempt from this change if they have particular conditions, for example those who need paracetamol to manage chronic pain, and these people are being advised to discuss this with their GP.

Dr Richard Palin, GP and East Leicestershire and Rutland CCG Governing Body Member, said: "As national and local NHS budgets are tightened, we must ensure we spend our money wisely. As a CCG we need to find £18 million in savings this year. It costs the NHS around three times as much to prescribe these medicines than it does for people to buy them at the pharmacy. By asking patients to buy medicines such as paracetamol, hayfever treatments and cold remedies from their pharmacist or supermarket, we can use the savings to fund essential health care."

East Leicestershire and Rutland CCG has taken this step after working with Healthwatch Leicestershire to get views from patients about changes, particularly to paracetamol prescribing. The majority of respondents to this answered that they would be affected either not at all or only a little by the changes to paracetamol prescribing. It has also taken clinical advice before reaching this decision.

Dr Palin adds: "Other CCGs in the country have already taken this step and we would rather make this change than have to look at taking funding away from other more essential healthcare services.

"If patients find their prescriptions are discontinued but they believe they shouldn't have been, we would urge them to talk to their GP in the first instance. If patients are concerned about the changes they can contact the medicines management team at the CCG."

Hundreds have their say on Paracetamol and Gluten-free food on prescription

November 17, 2016

Over 800 people in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland have had their say on the availability of paracetamol and gluten-free foods on prescription in a survey undertaken by the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) in the area, in conjunction with Healthwatch Leicestershire.

As part of their ongoing efficiency drive to ensure that NHS resources are used fairly across the entire population, CCGs have been looking at the way which they prescribe products which are also available to buy cheaply in pharmacies and supermarkets.

Paracetamol is available to buy cheaply and easily over the counter at supermarkets, pharmacies and many other retailers. In 2015/16 the NHS spent £1.5 million on prescribing paracetamol for patients in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This was to support patients with a wide range of illnesses, from what are known as self-limiting illnesses [1] such as sore throats and teething pain in babies, to chronic pain management. A further £700,000 was spent on prescribing gluten-free foods for people with Coeliac disease or Dermatitis Herpetiformis.

Following careful consideration of the survey responses, it has been decided that patients in Leicestershire and Rutland who use large quantities of paracetamol (for example for management of chronic pain conditions), will continue to receive paracetamol on prescription. However, patients should purchase paracetamol for use in the short term for self-limiting illnesses.

The majority of people said in the survey that they would be affected either 'not at all' or 'only a little' by the proposed change to paracetamol prescribing.

In East Leicestershire and Rutland these changes came into effect on 31 October 2016. In West Leicestershire, they will commence from 1 December 2016.

Dr. Chris Trzcinski, a local GP in West Leicestershire and clinical lead at West Leicestershire CCG, speaking on behalf of East Leicestershire and Rutland and West Leicestershire CCGs, said:

"We're extremely grateful to everyone who took the time to share what matters most to them regarding the prescription of both paracetamol and gluten free products. This has enabled us to really understand any impact on people that making changes to prescribing these items would have, and how we can continue to support people while ensuring the fairest use of our resources.

"To help us with this, we are asking patients not to request paracetamol on prescription from their GP unless required for chronic pain management and to purchase it instead."

The CCGs also sought to understand the nature of any impact on people, if changes were introduced to gluten-free prescriptions. Of the people who are currently in receipt of gluten-free foods on prescription, 60% said that they would be affected a

lot if gluten-free foods were no longer made available to them on prescription, 15% would be affected a little and 25% did say they wouldn't be affected.

As a result of the survey, from 1 December, the CCGs will be making the following changes to the prescribing of gluten free products across Leicestershire and Rutland:

- Patients who have been diagnosed with Coeliac Disease and/or Dermatitis Herpetiformis will receive up to 8 units per month of gluten free bread and flour.
- Prescribing of pasta, pizza bases, cereals and crisp breads is no longer recommended as these foods are available from supermarkets at a similar cost to their gluten containing equivalents and therefore the patient is not unfairly disadvantaged by having to purchase these goods

The NHS has been prescribing gluten-free food for over 30 years, but back then gluten-free foods were not easily available to buy in shops. In recent years this has changed and there is now a wide range of different products available in supermarkets. Gluten-free products can also be very expensive when obtained via an NHS prescription and the products are often considerably more costly than the price of a similar gluten-free product purchased in the supermarket.[2]

Dr Trzcinski continued: "We had a great response from people across Leicestershire and Rutland, telling us how they may be affected by changes to gluten free prescribing.

It is much easier nowadays to buy gluten free products now in the shops, and they don't cost much more than they do on prescription. However some people were concerned about the effect that stopping prescription of gluten free products completely would have on them, so patients with illnesses which require them to eat a gluten free diet will still be able to get up to eight units per month of gluten free bread and flour.

We think these changes to prescribing offer a fair way of utilising NHS resources wisely and results from our public survey show that the majority of people agree with us."

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