

Good practice guide for the prescribing of paracetamol

Paracetamol is readily available to buy cheaply over the counter at supermarkets, pharmacies and many other retailers. In 2016/17 the NHS spent over £320,000 on GP prescribing of paracetamol for patients in South West Essex.

As part of Basildon and Brentwood and Thurrock CCGs self-care agenda, patients are being asked to reconsider whether they need to request paracetamol 500mg tablets, capsules or suspension on prescription for self-limiting and minor conditions such as colds, flu, headaches and other aches and pains.

- GPs are advised to stop prescribing small quantities of paracetamol (packs of 32 tablets or capsules or less) and / or paracetamol for short-term use. Patients should be encouraged to purchase their own paracetamol from a pharmacy, local shop or supermarket. Patients should also be made aware that Community Pharmacies are ideally placed to provide further advice about the management of minor conditions.

It is however important to note that there are groups of patients who are prescribed regular paracetamol, up to a maximum of four times a day, in order to provide pain relief for long-term conditions such as osteoarthritis etc. This is entirely appropriate, and these patients should continue to receive prescriptions for appropriate quantities of paracetamol on the NHS.

- For those requiring regular, long-term paracetamol, GPs are advised to ensure that this use is reviewed on a regular basis and high quantities (greater than 100 tablets or capsules per month) are reviewed to ensure that the quantity is appropriate for the individual patient. This is to help reduce stockpiling, reduce waste and ultimately to improve patient safety.
- For those who are unable take tablets or capsules it is advised that if a liquid formulation is needed, the paracetamol 250mg/5ml oral suspension (including sugar-free), or the soluble tablets should be considered initially. The use of Paracetamol 500mg/5ml oral suspension or solution is not licensed for use in children, and not recommended for routine use in adults due to the significant cost.

Care Homes

- Where clinically appropriate, the use of paracetamol in care homes should be prescribed on a "when required basis" rather than regularly e.g. *ONE to TWO tablets/capsules up to FOUR times a day when required for pain.*

Paracetamol should not be routinely prescribed for short term use as packs of 32 or less are readily available to purchase.

Regular prescriptions of paracetamol for the treatment of long term conditions should be reviewed and large quantities of tablets/capsules/suspension should be discouraged.

Note: The decision to prescribe remains with the individual prescriber. There will be circumstances when it may be appropriate to prescribe these medicines. Under the NHS regulations GPs should prescribe any drugs that he or she feels are needed for a patient's medical care. A patient is entitled to drugs that the GP believes are necessary, not those which the patient feels should be prescribed" (BMA, 2013).

Providers commissioned to provide services on behalf of Thurrock CCG and Basildon and Brentwood CCG are reminded that they are required to follow the local joint formulary and prescribing guidance, or relevant Medicines Management agreement.

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