

MEDIA RELEASE

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Why buying your own simple painkillers could be a tonic for your local NHS



Prescriptions for paracetamol and other basic over-the-counter medicines are swallowing up NHS money which could be better spent on other healthcare services

Simple painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen can be bought for pennies from pharmacies and supermarkets. But they cost the NHS more than six times as much when they are provided on prescription.

That is the message from healthcare commissioners Basildon and Brentwood Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Thurrock CCG who are running an ongoing joint campaign to tackle medicines waste.

The CCGs are asking patients to purchase basic medicines such as paracetamol and ibuprofen themselves instead of asking GPs for a prescription. GPs in south west Essex currently write about 110,000 prescriptions a year for readily available painkillers at a potential cost of £3.75million to both organisations.

Denise Rabbette, Head of a joint dedicated Medicines Optimisation team covering both CCGs, said: "The NHS is facing huge financial pressures and we want people to be aware of the costs associated with GP prescriptions for simple painkillers that are available to buy over the counter without a prescription at pharmacies and supermarkets.

“Sixteen paracetamol or ibuprofen tablets are available for between 19p and 50p but every time a doctor writes a prescription, the NHS incurs additional charges through dispensing and administrative fees – and if GP time is also included the costs are even higher.

“By choosing to purchase their own simple medicines as part of their weekly shop, patients can help us save money that we can invest in other local health services. Patients won’t need a doctor’s appointment but can still get any advice they need from their local pharmacist.”

The CCGs recognise that patients with existing medical conditions who require paracetamol and ibuprofen in large quantities or higher doses may want to continue receiving them on repeat prescription.

Instead the campaign is targeting people who may go to their GP and get painkillers on prescription for short term complaints such as headaches, sore throats and sprains. The hope is that those patients will be prepared to buy their own paracetamol and ibuprofen with advice from a local pharmacist about self care, if required.

In a shop/supermarket an adult aged 16-plus can buy 16 paracetamol and 24 ibuprofen 200mg or 32 paracetamol over-the-counter. In a pharmacy a pharmacist may allow an adult to purchase a maximum of 96 paracetamol and 96 ibuprofen.

This ‘buy your own painkillers’ initiative is part of the wider **Waste Not, Want Not Medicines Waste** campaign to tackle the issue of unused prescription medicine which is estimated to waste around £2.5million locally.

Some ways in which you can support our Medicines Waste campaign:

- **Think about how you can take better care of yourself and talk to your pharmacist at the first signs of feeling unwell**
- **Buy your own paracetamol/ibuprofen for short term complaints**
- **Check your cupboards, only order the medicines you need and don’t stockpile prescription items**
- **Take medicines exactly as prescribed by your doctor or the pharmacist**
- **Ask your pharmacist for a medicines use review**
- **Remember that antibiotics do not work for MOST colds, coughs, sore throats or earache. Your body can usually fight these infections on its own**
- **Accept that your doctor will only prescribe antibiotics if he feels they are absolutely necessary**
- **Remember to take your medicines with you if you go into hospital**

ENDS

Notes to editors

For more information about the meeting, please email: thurrock.ccg@nhs.net

For further information about Thurrock CCG, visit our website at:

<http://www.thurrockccg.nhs.uk>