

### **Advice to Primary Care professionals - Optometrists use of OTC medicines**

In the year prior to June 2017, the NHS spent approximately £569 million on prescriptions for medicines, which could be purchased over the counter (OTC) from a pharmacy and/or other outlets such as petrol stations or supermarkets. These prescriptions include items for a condition:

- That is considered to be self-limiting and so does not need treatment as it will heal or be cured of its own accord;
- Which lends itself to self-care i.e. the person suffering does not normally need to seek medical advice and can manage the condition by purchasing OTC items directly
- This guidance applies to all patients, including those who would be exempt from paying prescription charges, unless they fall under the exceptions outlined.

#### **General Exceptions to the Guidance:**

There are however, certain scenarios where patients should continue to have their treatments prescribed and these are outlined below:

- Patients prescribed an OTC treatment for a long term condition (e.g. regular pain relief for chronic arthritis or treatments for inflammatory bowel disease).
- For the treatment of more complex forms of minor illnesses (e.g. severe migraines that are unresponsive to over the counter medicines).
- For those patients that have symptoms that suggest the condition is not minor (i.e. those with red flag symptoms for example indigestion with very bad pain.)
- Treatment for complex patients (e.g. immunosuppressed patients).
- Patients on prescription only treatments.
- Patients prescribed OTC products to treat an adverse effect or symptom of a more complex illness and/or prescription only medications should continue to have these products prescribed on the NHS.
- Circumstances where the product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold over the counter to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children and/or women who are pregnant or breastfeeding. Community Pharmacists will be aware of what these are and can advise accordingly.
- Patients with a minor condition suitable for self-care that has not responded sufficiently to treatment with an OTC product

It is envisioned that in most cases (unless specified) these minor conditions will clear up with appropriate self-care. If symptoms are not improving or responding to treatment, then patients should be encouraged to seek further advice.

#### Dry Eyes/Sore tired Eyes

Annual Spend c. £14,800,000

Rationale for recommendation Dry eye syndrome, or dry eye disease, is a common condition that occurs when the eyes don't make enough tears, or the tears evaporate too quickly. Most cases of sore tired eyes resolve themselves. Patients should be encouraged to manage both dry eyes and sore eyes by implementing some self-care measures such as good eyelid hygiene and avoidance of environmental factors alongside treatment Mild to moderate cases of dry eye syndrome or sore tired eyes can usually be treated using lubricant eye treatments that consist of a range of drops, gels and ointments that can be easily be purchased over the counter. References 1. NHS Choices: Dry eye syndrome accessed October 2017 2. NICE CKS: Dry eye syndrome accessed October 2017 Recommendation Advise CCGs that a prescription for treatment of dry or sore eyes should not routinely be offered in primary care as the condition is appropriate for self-care. Exceptions No routine exceptions have been identified. See earlier for general exceptions.

#### 4.2.3 Conjunctivitis

Annual Spend c. £500,000

Rationale for recommendation Treatment isn't usually needed for conjunctivitis as the symptoms usually clear within a week. There are several self-care measures that may help with symptoms. If treatment is needed, then treatment is dependent on the cause:

- In severe bacterial cases, antibiotic eye drops and eye ointments can be used to clear the infection.
- Irritant conjunctivitis will clear up as soon as whatever is causing it is removed.
- Allergic conjunctivitis can usually be treated with antiallergy medications such as antihistamines. The substance that caused the allergy should be avoided. Treatments for conjunctivitis can be purchased over the counter however almost half of all simple cases of conjunctivitis clear up within ten days without any treatment.

Public Health England (PHE) advises that children with infective conjunctivitis do not need to be excluded from school, nursery or child minders, and it does not state any requirement for treatment with topical antibiotics. References 1. NHS Choices: Conjunctivitis accessed October 2017 2. NICE CKS: Conjunctivitis - Infective accessed October 2017 3. PHE Advice for schools: September 2017 4. NICE Medicines evidence commentary: conjunctivitis and inappropriate prescribing. Recommendation Advise CCGs that a prescription for treatment of conjunctivitis should not routinely be offered in primary care as the condition is self-limiting and will clear up on its own without the need for treatment. Exceptions 'Red Flag' symptoms