

Guidance on Repeat Prescribing Quantities and Durations

Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board supports the issue of 28 or 56 day repeat prescriptions, to be applied with rational flexibility, in order to balance clinical appropriateness, cost effectiveness, patient safety and reduce medication waste.

- Over a billion NHS prescription medicines are issued by pharmacists in England every year, at a cost of over £9 billion¹.
- Two thirds of prescriptions generated in primary care are for patients requiring repeat medicines and these account for nearly 80% of medicines' costs in primary care².
- In Gloucestershire in 2022/23, over 13.6 million items were prescribed by GPs, costing £105 million (obtained from ePACT2).
- It is estimated that the cost to the NHS of medicines wastage in England is £300 million per year. This represents approximately £1 in every £25 spent on primary care and community pharmaceutical and allied products use³. For Gloucestershire this represents more than £4 million per year of wasted medicines.
- It has been generally accepted that issuing repeat prescriptions of 28 days in length will reduce medicine wastage⁴, but studies^{5,6,7} have indicated that prescribing a longer duration results in lower total unnecessary costs when dispensing fees and prescriber time is included in addition to the cost of the wasted medicines.
- The UK Department of Health⁸ advised that the frequency of repeat prescriptions should '*... balance patient convenience with clinical appropriateness, cost-effectiveness and patient safety.*', but did not recommend a specific time period.

Where patients have stable long-term conditions and can manage their stocks of medicines effectively, prescriptions for longer periods may be more suitable and more convenient for patients.

There are also situations when a shorter prescription quantity is appropriate, for example for patients who are at risk of overdosing, have rapidly changing medication regimens or there are issues with medication stability.

In determining how much of a medicine to prescribe, prescribers should first ensure that the prescription meets the clinical needs of the patient, but it is important that the views and circumstances of the patient are also considered when decisions are taken about their clinical management.

Factors that prescribers should consider when deciding prescription duration for individual patients as exceptions to the usual prescribing policy include:

- Stability of the patient's condition and how often their clinical reviews are required.
- The risk of important side effects and hence the need for more frequent monitoring.
- How likely it is that the patient will take the medicine as they intended.
- Safety considerations associated with storing the particular medicine in the home.
- Patient convenience including, where relevant, cost in prescription charges.
- Strong advice to limit the quantity for schedule 2, 3 and 4 CDs prescribed, to amounts that meet the patient's clinical need for up to 30 days supply⁹.

Many patients who are prescribed repeat medicines may be exempt from prescription charges. Those who pay for prescriptions would benefit from purchasing a Prescription Prepayment Certificate if they need more than 3 items in 3 months, or 11 items in 12 months. Patients can order these online at [the NHSBSA webpage](https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk) and at some community pharmacies. Further details are available at <https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/help-nhs-prescription-costs>

References

1. Prescription Cost Analysis - England, 2016 [Internet]. NHS Digital. Available from: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/prescription-cost-analysis/prescription-cost-analysis-england-2016>
2. PrescQIPP: Repeat prescribing in primary care. [Internet]. Available from: <https://www.prescqipp.info/umbraco/surface/authorisedmediasurface/index?url=%2fmedia%2f1629%2fb124-repeat-prescribing-21.pdf>
3. Evaluation of the Scale, Causes and Costs of Waste Medicines Final Report [Internet]. Available from: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1350234/1/Evaluation_of_NHS_Medicines_Waste_web_publication_version.pdf
4. PSNC Briefing 086/13: Medicines Wastage and Prescription Duration [Internet]. 2013 [cited 2023 Jun 7]. Available from: <https://cpe.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/PSNC-Briefing-086.13-Medicines-Wastage-and-prescription-duration.pdf>
5. Martin A, Payne R, Wilson EC. Long-Term Costs and Health Consequences of Issuing Shorter Duration Prescriptions for Patients with Chronic Health Conditions in the English NHS. *Applied Health Economics and Health Policy*. 2018 Mar 12;16(3):317–30.
6. Miani C, Martin A, Exley J, Doble B, Wilson E, Payne R, et al. Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of issuing longer versus shorter duration (3-month vs. 28-day) prescriptions in patients with chronic conditions: systematic review and economic modelling. *Health Technology Assessment*. 2017 Dec;21(78):1–128.
7. Doble B, Payne R, Harshfield A, Wilson ECF. Retrospective, multicohort analysis of the Clinical Practice Research Datalink (CPRD) to determine differences in the cost of medication wastage, dispensing fees and prescriber time of issuing either short (<60 days) or long (≥60 days) prescription lengths in primary care for common, chronic conditions in the UK. *BMJ Open*. 2017 Dec;7(12):e019382.
8. UK Government Web Archive [Internet]. webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk. [cited 2023 Jun 7]. Available from: https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/+www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/Browsable/DH_4892136
9. GP mythbuster 28: Management of controlled drugs - Care Quality Commission [Internet]. www.cqc.org.uk. Available from: <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/gps/gp-mythbusters/gp-mythbuster-28-management-controlled-drugs>

Miani C, Payne R. Repeat prescriptions are expensive and time consuming – it's time for an NHS rethink [Internet]. *The Conversation*. 2018. Available from: <https://theconversation.com/repeat-prescriptions-are-expensive-and-time-consuming-its-time-for-an-nhs-rethink-93522>