NHS
Suffolk and
North East Essex

Implementing National Prescribing Guidance in Primary Care

Assurance for GPs and Non-medical Prescribers (NMPs)

Background

Between 2017 and 2019, NHS England and NHS Clinical Commissioners (NHSCC) published two key pieces of guidance to support former Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) to fulfil their duties around appropriate use of their resources.

- 'Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care.'
- 'Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care.'

The guidance sought to support CCGs (now Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)) in their decision-making, to address unwarranted variation, and to provide clear national advice to make local prescribing practices more effective.

NHS England expects ICBs to take this guidance into account in formulating local policies, and prescribers to reflect local policies in their prescribing practice.

Concerns

The ICB understands that GP practices may be uncertain about following this guidance, and some have raised concerns about whether they would be in breach of the terms of their contract if they do so.

We would therefore like to draw your attention to the letter of comfort provided by Professor Stephen Powis on 31st January 2019. Although originally published in response to concerns around the OTC prescribing guidance, the content and rationale is equally applicable to the low priority prescribing guidance:

NHS England » Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: letter from Professor Stephen Powis

Summary of assurances

The letter of comfort provides the following assurances:

- GMS, PMS and APMS regulations all state that contractors must have regard to all relevant guidance issued by NHS England.
- The regulations do not state that the guidance needs to be directed to GP practices, but simply be relevant.
- The guidance includes specific reference to prescribers and requires prescribers to reflect local policies in prescribing practice.
- Contractors are therefore required to have regard to this guidance and are able to follow the guidance and exercise judgement about when it is (and is not) appropriate to prescribe, without any risk that they will be in breach of their contract.
- GPs are also able to inform patients they must have regard to this guidance when communicating any decision not to prescribe.

The ICB Primary Care Contracts team has confirmed that there have been no changes to the regulations referenced above, hence these assurances remain relevant and applicable.