

Paid Carer Support to Patients and Multi-compartment Compliance Aids (MCAs)¹

LPCs are driven by the needs of their contractors. It is recognised that MCAs are an issue for many community pharmacies and in response to contractor requests CPWY has produced this document to assist pharmacies with dealing with requests for MCAs from paid carers.

What is the MCA issue?

The demand for MCAs has increased over the past decade. The factors in this are complex but include: a system reliance on MCA to support care (home care and hospitals often demand MCA supply), a belief by many (including patients, carers and medics) that MCA improves compliance (without evidence that this is the case), a belief that MCA supply from pharmacy is nationally funded / contracted and some pharmacies historically promoted MCA to patients to secure prescription flow into the pharmacy. Many pharmacies feel pressured into supplying MCA by others in the system.

As nationally outlined by the [RPS](#), the use of Multi-compartment Compliance Aids (MCAs) is sometimes regarded by the public and health and social care providers as the only remedy to support adherence to medicines. There is confusion about when MCAs are appropriate to recommend. MCAs are often integrated into practice and service policy without giving due consideration to alternatives.

Although MCAs may be of value to some, they are not always the best intervention for all patients and many alternative interventions are available. As well as patient factors, there are also a number of considerations to be taken into account in deciding if a medicine is suitable for inclusion in an MCA and it should be acknowledged that re-packaging of medication from the manufacturer's original packaging may render it unlicensed. It will also involve risks and responsibility for the professional making those decisions.

Historically community pharmacy has done increasing numbers of MCAs, but with the current underfunding of the pharmacy contract, and without additional payments to fund provision of MCAs, many pharmacies are unable to sustain their current level of MCA supply. As a consequence, many pharmacies have no choice but to reduce their offer of medicines supplied in an MCA to those patients who meet the Equality Act requirements and where an MCA is considered to be a reasonable adjustment.

Paid Carer Support to Patients and MCAs

Patients in care homes or those who have care workers do not routinely require an MCA. MCAs should only be considered for individual patients who manage their own medicines and who have a genuine, clinical need. MCAs are intended for people to use themselves to assist self-administration and to help them retain their independence. If there is a paid carer whose role it is to assist in the administration of medication, then it is unlikely to be reasonable for the pharmacy to have to provide an MCA under the Equality Act for the patient concerned.

¹ Multi-compartment Compliance Aids (MCAs) also known as MCCAs, monitored dosage systems (MDS), multiple dosage systems, dosette boxes, blister packs and trays are medicine storage devices with compartments divided into days of the week and various times of each day.

If care homes or care agencies (as part of their internal policies) or relatives/carers want patients' medicines to be supplied in MCAs, as a matter of convenience, then this will be outside the scope of Equality Act provisions and it is not paid for by the NHS. As there is no funding available within the NHS to support the provision of MCA to this group of patients, the cost may have to be negotiated between the patient/carer/care home/care agency and the community pharmacist/dispenser. The community pharmacy is under no obligation under the Equality Act to supply patients with an MCA who have paid carers that administer their medicines.

Although many care provider organisations insist that medicines should be dispensed in MCAs in order for staff to provide medicines support, neither the Medicines Act 1968 nor the Care Quality Commission (CQC) stipulate this as a pre-requisite. CQC outcome 9 (regulation 13) management of medicines and outcome 13 (regulation 22) staffing, require that provider organisations providing the care worker must make sure they have sufficient staff with the right knowledge, experience, qualifications and skills to support the people that they are caring for.

There are three different levels of support that care workers are required to provide patients in domiciliary care:

- **Level 1:** The person takes responsibility for their own medication. The person takes the initiative for taking their medicines but can be prompted occasionally or assisted physically. The care worker provides support e.g. helping the patient select the right tablet.
- **Level 2:** It is considered that the person cannot take responsibility for their medicines and that care staff will need to do this. At this level, the care staff takes the initiative, makes the decision as to whether the patient needs the medicines or not and it may include assisting to physically administer the medication.
- **Level 3:** Exceptional circumstances where medication needs to be given by specialised techniques e.g. administering insulin, oxygen. The care worker requires extra training to carry out this level of support.

If the care plan for the patient requires the care worker to 'assist' the patient, then the care worker should have the necessary skills to open containers, and hand the medicines to the patient (whether they are in MCA or original containers). If, however, the care worker is expected to administer medicines then the care worker should have the qualifications and skills to be able to interpret instructions on the medicines container and should not require an MCA.

The employer of the care worker should specify the boundaries as to whether the care worker will assist with or administer medicines and it is the obligation of the employer to ensure that the care worker has the requisite skills and qualifications to undertake the roles. Carer organisations may benefit from seeking the assistance of a pharmacist to provide relevant training to care workers on interpreting dispensing labels. Carer organisations should not simply rely on community pharmacists to provide medicines in MCA as a matter of routine to lower the skills required of care workers.

Social Care Medicines Policy

Local Authorities publish a Social Care Medication Policy for their area. Links to these policies are on the CPWY website here: <https://www.cpw.org/pharmacy-contracts-services/essential-services/dispensing/#MDS>

The Local Authority Medicine Policies in West Yorkshire do not state that Social care workers must have medicines supplied within an MCA to enable them to provide medication support to patients.

Dealing with Requests for MCAs from Social Care / Paid Care Workers

It is for each pharmacy to determine how they deal with requests for MCAs from social care / paid care workers. The pharmacy is responsible for any adjustment provided (or not).

CPWY advise that contractors consider:

- Is the request for an MCA a reasonable adjustment for the individual under the requirements of the Equality Act? If an MCA is a reasonable adjustment then the MCA must be provided to the patient free of charge. Note that other adjustments should be considered, and a patient-focused decision made.
- While making an assessment is not an obligation, an assessment of the patients' needs to support them in taking their medication is recommended to support the decision in relation to the Equality Act and making a reasonable adjustment.
- MCAs should only be considered for individual patients who manage their own medicines and who have a genuine, clinical need.
- Where an MCA is supplied that a check is made as to the suitability and stability of the medicine within an MCA. See <https://www.sps.nhs.uk/home/tools/medicines-in-compliance-aids-stability-tool/> for further information on stability.
- Pharmacies are not obliged to dispense free MCA for patient, carer or prescriber convenience or to help improve compliance for patients who do not otherwise qualify under the Equality Act.
- Although many care provider organisations (social services or private carers) may insist that medicines should be dispensed in MCA in order for their staff to provide medicines support, neither the Medicines Act 1968 nor the Care Quality Commission (CQC) stipulate this as a prerequisite. Instead, the obligation is with the care organisation to train their staff accordingly to administrate medicines from standard bottles and cartons.
- It is recommended that the pharmacy records the rationale for making an adjustment (or not) and the adjustment made within the PMR.
- Inform the patient (or carer of the decision).
- If the pharmacy has assessed that the patient does not qualify for a reasonable adjustment under the Equality Act and the patient / carer wishes for an MCA to be supplied the pharmacy can consider offering an MCA to the patient / carer at a reasonable cost.
- Use the evidence / key national information (see below) alongside the Local Authority Medicines Policy to respond to any demands from Social Care / Paid Care workers that the pharmacy must supply medicines within an MCA.

Information to Support this Statement

Resource title	Link	Key quotes
CQC statement on MCA in C19	https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/adult-social-care/covid-19-medicines-information-adult-social-care-providers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community pharmacies are not required to provide MCAs under the pharmacy contract.• Care organisations will need to consider what to do if the supply changes from MCAs to original packs. They must review and update risk assessments, policies and procedures, staff training and competency assessments.• GPs and other healthcare professionals must make reasonable adjustments to help people take their medicines. The Equality Act 2010 requires such adjustments and MCAs may form part of these. This means that MCAs should be still available to support people to self-administer.

<p>What products or interventions are available to aid medication adherence?</p>	<p>https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg76</p>	<p>The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) advises no single intervention can solve non-adherence and proposes a range of interventions, tailored to each individual be made available to promote medication adherence.</p> <p>Multi-compartment compliance aids filled by pharmacists should not be used routinely. The risks of using MCAs are widely documented and their benefit in relation to medication adherence is unknown. Unless there is clear, explicit rationale for the use of MCAs, the default should be to supply medicines in their original packaging.</p> <p>A small number of patients may be eligible to have an MCA filled by a pharmacy. For example, an older person with mild cognitive impairment who has a complex but stable medication regimen and limited support from family and friends and no carer may benefit from an MCA.</p>
<p>SPS Summary of Guidance and Evidence for use of MultiCompartment Compliance Aids (MCCAs).</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no legal requirement for an MCCA to be provided to a patient, carer or care facility and it should not be presumed that a patient with a disability, who requires an auxiliary aid, must always be supplied with an MCCA, as there are other possibly more appropriate and helpful ways to support people in taking medicines effectively. • There is a lack of high-quality published research investigating the use, appropriateness, safety and concerns of MCCAs in all UK settings. • The impact of MCCAs on medication adherence is unknown. • The evidence comparing the safety of MCCAs against original pack dispensing is limited and comparisons to other adherence aids lacking. • The published evidence reviewed strongly suggests that patients with medication adherence issues undergo an assessment to jointly identify the best adherence aid for them. • The preference for patients with adherence issues is to supply medication in original packaging with appropriate adherence aids. • Patients and carers using MCCAs should be assessed for adherence and concerns after a few weeks of starting the aid. The patient should be re-assessed after any changes in their needs, e.g. after hospital discharge, and regularly at 6-12 months. • The lack of reported incidents around the use of MCCAs does not imply that these aids are without negative impact on patient safety. • Where the best adherence aid for an individual is suggested to be a MCCA, then the patient and their carers must be educated and trained in the use of the aid. • Not all medications are suitable for MCCA's. The decision to use an MCCA must therefore include a technical assessment of suitability of each medicine. • If some medicines are necessarily kept Ffund an MCCA, this increases the complexity of the medication regimen and may result in some medicines being missed.
<p>PrescQIPP Bulletin 174: Care homes – Use of monitored dosage systems</p>	<p>https://www.prescqip.info/media/1235/b174-care-homes-use-of-monitored-dosage-systems-20.pdf</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of multidose or single dose compliance aids are no longer considered the best method of managing medicines in care homes; instead the use of original packs is being endorsed as the preferred option for carer administration and this resource has been developed to support changes in practice.
<p>NICE Supporting people receiving social care in the community to take their medicines</p>	<p>https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng67</p>	<p>The NICE guideline: managing medicines in care homes lists only advantages associated with the use of original packs when considering administration, and no disadvantages, but identified several disadvantages for administration when using MCA including: over-reliance on MCAs that may de-skill care home staff; possible failure of care home staff to look at the label and description of medicine; and the use of two systems – MCA and original pack dispensing.</p>

<p>CQC Administering medicines in home care agencies</p>	<p>https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/adult-social-care/administering-medicines-home-care-agencies</p>	<p>Medicines support is any support that enables a person to manage their medicines. In practical terms, this covers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prompting or reminding people to take their medicines • helping people remove medicines from packaging • administering some or all of a person's medicines
<p>Social Care Medicines Policy</p>	<p>https://www.cpw.y.org/pharmacy-contracts-services/essential-services/dispensing/#MDS</p>	<p>The Local Authority Medicine Policies in West Yorkshire do not state that social care workers must have medicines supplied within an MCA to enable them to provide medication support to patients.</p>