

CPWY requests understanding and support of the significant problems that community pharmacy teams are facing with regards to medicines shortages.

1. Medicines Supply: Current Situation for Pharmacies and Patients

- Community pharmacy teams have been struggling for some time to source certain medicines. In some cases, availability is an issue. In other cases, medicines are available but at significantly inflated prices.
- Pharmacy teams are spending lots of time sourcing medicines, sometimes contacting up multiple wholesalers to find a medicine. This leads to delays for patients needing the medicine.
- Community pharmacists use a range of measures to ensure patients can access medicines in short supply, including:
 - “Staged” dispensing – this is where pharmacies only give patients some of their medicines and ask them to come back to collect the rest of the prescription later.
 - Liaising with GPs to find alternative medicines that may be suitable for patients.
 - Making many phone calls to different suppliers to try to source the medicines.
 - Seeing if stock is available in other local pharmacies, noting that due to a range of factors including wholesalers used, stock availability varies between pharmacies.
- Medicines supply is complex, variable and impacted by many factors. A reliable single list of medicines with supply issues cannot be created. Check for known, enduring national supply issues in the [Medicines Supply Tool](#).

2. Medicines Supply and Pricing

- Supply issues are not a new phenomenon, but there has been a recent surge in the number of medicines affected.
- Medicines shortages are caused by a range of factors, including manufacturing problems. Generic prices in England are incredibly low compared other parts of the world, which makes the market less attractive.
- There is variability with respect to which wholesalers have stock available. While one pharmacy may be able to access supply through a particular wholesaler, if another pharmacy does not have an account with that wholesaler, they may still be unable to obtain supplies.
- Pharmacies work hard to purchase medicines cost effectively, but shortages often lead to price increases. Where a shortage leads to a significant price increase, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) can grant a ‘price concession’ recognising this. Price concessions are examined monthly, and an increase in concessions being granted is an indicator of supply problems.
- There has been a consistently high number of medicines granted price concessions each month throughout 2023, with over 100 granted some months, and this trend shows no signs of abating. Read more about [concessions system here](#).
- Medicine supply is a national issue, but there can be regional variation of supply and pricing issues can affect individual pharmacies more than others. This adds to the ongoing financial pressures on pharmacies.

3. Impact on Prescribers and Key Patient Messages

- GPs may increasingly be contacted by pharmacies and asked to consider alternatives if stock is unobtainable.
- Prescriptions for alternative medicines may need to be issued so that patients can receive treatment more quickly.
- Duplicate prescriptions may be needed to allow patients to obtain stock from multiple pharmacies. NB Patient choice must be considered when deciding whether to issue an alternative medicine or duplicate prescription.
- In some circumstances, pharmacies may need to obtain ‘imported’ or ‘special order’ formulations of a drug. In which case, the medicine needs to be prescribed as an imported or ‘special order’ product. Specifically, the words ‘Imported’ or ‘Special Order’ description MUST appear in the **first line as part of the drug name field**. If written anywhere else on the prescription form, NHSBSA will not reimburse the pharmacy correctly.
- Prescribers are requested to resist writing prescriptions for longer periods of time as this could exacerbate issues.
- A leaflet to explain medicines shortages to patients is available [here](#).
- Patients should be encouraged to order repeat prescriptions in good time and only to reorder the medicines needed.