

Stock Shortages – Proposing Alternative Medicines to GPs

Community Pharmacy West Yorkshire is aware of the unprecedented stock issues that pharmacy contractors are facing and that community pharmacy teams are working really hard to make sure patients get the medicines they need. We know that pharmacies are spending significant time trying to source drugs.

In Community Pharmacy West Yorkshire's discussions with GPs, LMCs and ICBs we have reports of the impact stock shortages also have on GP practices. One common feedback is that the GP does not know what potential alternatives the pharmacy has in stock. If a prescription is supplied for another item that is also unavailable it creates more work for everyone and delays the patient accessing their medicine.

Where possible, when pharmacies are asking GP surgeries to prescribe an alternative product, it would be helpful if they could suggest at least one product that they know is available.

Assumptions

- The pharmacy will have already tried to obtain the product from **all** the wholesalers they have access to.
- The pharmacy is unable to direct the patient to another pharmacy as other items have already been supplied on the prescription.
- The pharmacy is unable to direct the patient to another pharmacy as there is no stock available locally.
- The patient has an urgent need for an alternative in the next few days and is unable to wait for stock to be available again.
- An alternative cannot be supplied using a Statutory Shortage Protocol (SSP).

Pharmacies will only contact a GP surgery for an alternative prescription when all other options have been exhausted.

There are many different methods of communicating with practices and you should agree with your local practice what their preferred method is. If using NHSmail, you may want to use a template email to make the process quicker. We have created one for you to use [here](#). This template could also be used for making requests on paper, if that is the preferred method.

Key Factors to Consider Before Recommending an Alternative

Although the responsibility for safe and appropriate prescribing rests with the prescriber, those recommending changes to prescriptions must ensure that recommendations are appropriate for each patient and within your scope of competency to recommend.

It would be preferable to speak to the GP where a change in drug / dose is being considered. You may wish to approach the discussion by asking "if you give me some clinical alternatives that you would like to prescribe, I can then check the availability information on those medicines".

- Consider the clinical indication for the drug to ensure that any recommended alternative is appropriate (and licenced).

- Ensure that if a recommendation for a possible alternative is being made for a different brand of drug that the form and dose are equivalent (e.g. that the dose and combination of hormones in an alternative HRT are the same as was originally prescribed).
- If a product that is being recommended is a different drug to that prescribed, then make this clear in your communication with the GP.
- Consider if there are other clinical factors such as allergies, renal or hepatic impairment, monitoring requirements, previous treatments etc.
- You may want to add a note to any recommended product to make clear that you do not have access to the full patient record and the recommendation that you made was done with the best information available to you.

If you do not have enough information to give a recommendation for an alternative medicine, then let the prescriber know this is the case and offer to discuss with the prescriber the alternatives that they would like to prescribe, and you will let them know about stock availability.