

Prescribing of Generic Medication Position Statement

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board supports the routine prescribing of generic medication in primary care

Why does a medicine have multiple names?

There are three ways to describe the naming and patent status of medicines; generic, brand and branded generic.^{1,2}

- The generic name – this is the approved name of the active ingredient in the medicine and used for marketing after the expiry of patent or other exclusivity rights. An example is metformin 500mg tablets.
- The brand (trade or innovator) name - this is the name given to a pharmaceutical product by the manufacturer who created the medicine. The use of this name is reserved exclusively to the original manufacturer as opposed to the generic name. An example is Glucophage® 500mg tablets.
- Branded generics – these brand names are different from innovator brand names. Many different branded generic products of the same medicine can be on the market in a country along with the original branded product once the original brand has lost patent protection. An example is Axpinet® 500mg tablets.

An information leaflet is available to support discussions with patients about generic medicines.

Why is generic prescribing preferred?

- Generic medicines are generally more readily available than branded or branded generic medicines.
- If a medicine is prescribed by its generic name, the pharmacist may dispense any suitable generic or a branded product, which could reduce delays in supplying medicines to the patient.²
- Generic prescribing can reduce the risk of prescribing or dispensing errors as each medicine has only one approved International Non-Proprietary Name (INN) name, rather than a variety of brand names.²
- Prescribing generically can improve a patient's familiarity and confidence with their medicines names although presentation may vary. It is also less confusing for carers, clinicians and those in wider access services such as Out of Hours and Accident and Emergency.
- For generically written prescriptions, community pharmacies seek to obtain the best available generic prices, thus driving down the costs being charged by wholesalers and manufacturers. This creates a competitive market.³ After a medicine is dispensed pharmacies claim reimbursement from the NHS with prices set in the NHS Drug Tariff.⁴
- Branded generics disrupt the funding mechanism that contributes to the financial viability of community pharmacies and can push up the overall cost of medicines to the NHS.
- Community pharmacists should continue to dispense generic medicines using the most cost-effective option available and report any dispensing at loss via the agreed

contractual mechanism. They should not ask prescribers to prescribe by brand to avoid dispensing at a financial loss.

When should a medicine be prescribed by a brand name?

- There are some circumstances where a medicine should be prescribed by a brand name. These include:
 - where there are bioavailability differences between brands, particularly if the medicine has a narrow therapeutic index,
 - where modified release (MR) preparations are not interchangeable,
 - where administration devices have different instructions for use,
 - where branded and generic preparations have different licensed indications
 - where brand name prescribing reduces the risk of confusion in dispensing and administration i.e. modified release opioids and opioid patches,
 - where the product is a biological rather than chemical entity.
- Ensuring supply of a consistent product at the lowest cost can be helpful in some circumstances, depending on the product and individual clinical need of the patient.
- A list of “[Example medicines to prescribe by brand name in primary care](#)” is published by the Specialist Pharmacy Service. Note that this list is not exhaustive.⁵
- Prescribers should avoid prescribing generic medicines where the generic name is followed by the name of a manufacturer. These are known as “premium-priced” or “Ghost Generics”.
- Clinicians can find relevant brand prescribing advice at the formulary entry for the drug in the Cheshire and Merseyside Area Prescribing Group (APG) formulary, and via prescribing decision support messages at the point of prescribing.
- Where branded prescribing is recommended consideration will be given to the cost and availability of different brands. Branded generics may be recommended if an appropriate option.
- Medicine constituents will be added by generic name in formulary, where deemed appropriate, so it appears when searching the generic name in netFormulary
- The ICB may occasionally recommend prescribing branded generic medicines in certain circumstances. In these instances, the ICB will make an assessment on the appropriateness of using the branded generic medicines in key areas such as availability, financial implication and clinical appropriateness, along with relevant stakeholders. These decisions will be communicated through usual communication channels, including through prescribing decision support software messages.

References

- 1) [Bulletin 290: Branded generic medicines](#) PrescQIPP
- 2) [Prescribing by generic or brand name in primary care](#) Specialist Pharmacy Service
- 3) [Branded Generics](#) Community Pharmacy England
- 4) [Drug tariff](#) NHSBSA
- 5) [Example medicines to prescribe by brand name in primary care](#) Specialist Pharmacy Service

Adapted, with permission, from a position statement developed by NHS South West London Integrated Care Board.