

To:
Primary Care Optometrists
Community Pharmacists

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www.hscboard.hscni.net

15th November 2018

Dear Colleagues,

OPTIMISING MEDICINES USE IN PRIMARY CARE BY REDUCING THE PRESCRIBING OF TREATMENTS AVAILABLE OVER THE COUNTER (OTC TREATMENTS) FOR COMMON CONDITIONS AND NON EVIDENCE BASED MEDICINES.

Mr Richard Pengelly, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health, wrote to GP prescribers on 1st December 2016 to request immediate support to reduce the prescribing of the following types of medicines:

- Medicines for the treatment of minor conditions and self-limiting illnesses which may be purchased at low cost without the need for a GP appointment or prescription, *or*
- Medicines with limited evidence of efficacy

We are writing to also request your support in your clinical practice in promoting self-care for minor eye conditions, e.g. Dry Eye, Blepharitis, and for non-evidence based supplements for Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD).

Patients, typically with mild to moderate levels of dry eye will frequently present to their optometrist or community pharmacy and may be managed without the need for referral to their GP or an ophthalmologist. Similarly, patients diagnosed with early dry AMD can be signposted to current best evidence and advice for this condition.

Resources to Support Implementation

The HSCB has developed resources to assist practices with this work and links to these are included in the references below.

Dry Eye and Blepharitis Treatments

Dry eye is a common ocular condition. Prescribed treatments include lifestyle changes including: using humidifiers; stopping smoking; taking regular breaks from the computer, to encourage blinking, artificial tears and lubricants.

The NI Formulary provides recommendations for first, second and third line treatments options and to support healthcare professionals, a resource 'Prescribing Guidelines for Dry Eye Management' has been developed.¹ Patient information leaflets are also available including general advice on managing dry eyes and blepharitis.²

The GP practices across NI are implementing the recommendations of the NI Formulary and we ask that optometrists and community pharmacist do the same.

Treatments options for minor eye conditions such as dry eyes and blepharitis may be purchased over the counter. The Ophthalmic Treatment Recommendation Form (Appendix 1) may be useful for Optometrists when referring patients to their community pharmacy for medication.

Non-evidence based products

Evidence for effectiveness of supplements for AMD is weak. In February 2016, the HSCB wrote to prescribers advising that supplements for AMD should not be prescribed on Health Service prescriptions. A patient information leaflet was also produced to support this advice (Appendix 2).

ACTION REQUIRED:

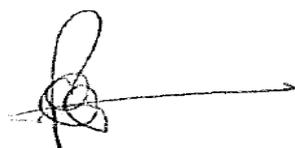
1. Patients should be counselled on how to manage minor eye conditions, signposted to the HSCB patient information leaflets² accordingly and advised that products may be purchased over the counter.
2. Prescribing of products for managing minor eye conditions e.g. Dry Eyes or Blepharitis or supplements for AMD is not supported by the HSCB. Nutritional supplements for AMD such as: Icaps®, Ocuvite®, Macushield®, PreserVision®, Viteyes®, and

Blephaclean® wipes for lid hygiene are on the HSCB Stop List and patients should not be referred to their GP for a prescription.³

3. Optometrists who are accredited to provide the NI PEARS⁴ service should ensure that any recommendations arising as a result of their clinical assessments are aligned to the NI Formulary guidance.¹ If the patient requires preservative free drops, please specify the reason; provide information about the options that have already been tried and whether patients have been provided with the appropriate information leaflets.²

If you would like any further information or advice on this issue, please contact your local Optometric or Pharmacy Adviser.

Yours sincerely,



Raymond Curran
Assistant Director of Integrated Care
Head of Ophthalmic Services



Joe Brogan
Assistant Director of Integrated Care
Head of Pharmacy and Medicines
Management

References

1. HSCB 2018. Prescribing Guidelines for Dry Eye Management. Available at: <http://niformulary.hscni.net/Formulary/Adult/11.0/Pages/default.aspx>
2. HSCB 2018. Patient Zone. Eye Care. Available at: <http://niformulary.hscni.net/PatientZone/eye/Pages/default.aspx>
3. HSCB 2018. Stop List. Available at: <http://niformulary.hscni.net/DePres/stoplist/Pages/default.aspx>
4. HSCB 2018. HSCB Optometry. Available at: <http://primarycare.hscni.net/optometry/>
(Access through Primary Care Intranet only)

Contact details for Local Integrated Care Offices:

Belfast

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South Eastern

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Tel: 028 9536 3926

Southern

Tower Hill
Armagh.
BT61 9DR
Tel: 028 9536 2104

Northern

County Hall
182 Galgorm Road
Ballymena BT42 1QB
Tel: 028 9536 2845

Western

Gransha Park House
15 Gransha Park
Clooney Road
Londonderry BT47 6FN
Tel: 028 9536 1010

**OPHTHALMIC TREATMENT RECOMMENDATION.
REFERRAL TO COMMUNITY PHARMACY FORM.**

You have a common condition that can be treated with a medication that is available to buy over the counter (OTC) from your local pharmacy.

You do not need to make an appointment to speak to the pharmacist, just pop in anytime and they will be happy to help you.

Your optometrist has suggested the treatment listed below. Ask the pharmacist for further help and advice on the most appropriate medication to relieve your symptoms for:

<i>Condition</i>	<i>Treatment suggested to purchase OTC</i>
Dry eyes	
Blepharitis	
Other:	

If at any time you are concerned about your condition or if your symptoms are not improving after a few days of treatment with the over the counter medications you should contact the optometrist, local pharmacist or your GP for more advice.

For more information visit

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/community-pharmacists>

<http://niformulary.hscni.net/PatientZone/SC/Pages/default.aspx>

Patient information leaflets are also available from the NI Formulary website, including general advice on managing dry eyes and blepharitis

<http://niformulary.hscni.net>

OPTOMETRIST/OMP _____ **NI Code:** _____

PRACTICE _____ **Date:** _____

Information about changes to medicines or treatments on the Health Service:

Changes to lutein and antioxidant supplements prescribing.

The Health Service is asking doctors to stop or greatly reduce the prescribing of some treatments on prescription. This is because the treatments are:

- Not as safe as other treatments OR
- Not as good (effective) as other treatments OR
- More expensive than other treatments that do the same thing.

This includes lutein and antioxidant supplements.

This document will explain why the changes are happening and where you can get more information and support.

What are lutein and antioxidant supplements?

Lutein and antioxidant supplements contain vitamins A, C and E, minerals such as zinc and substances called carotenoids, such as lutein and zeaxanthin. There are several different products on the market.

They are said to help prevent an eye condition called Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD), or to stop AMD getting worse in people who already have it.

Why will lutein and antioxidant supplements not be prescribed anymore?

The idea of using antioxidant vitamins to prevent AMD came from an American study, which suggested that they would benefit patients. However, the possible benefits seen in this study were not repeated in later studies as **vitamins did not stop AMD from getting worse**. There is not enough evidence that they work.

There is also some concern that the high doses of vitamins and minerals in these supplements may cause harm in some people.

What can I do if I still want to take lutein and antioxidant supplements?

Supplements can be bought over-the-counter from a pharmacy (chemist) or health food shop. They are not suitable for everyone, so ask for advice from a pharmacist.

Are there any other things I can do to reduce my risk of AMD?

Eating a healthy diet rich in oily fish, leafy green vegetables and fresh fruit is recommended. Protect your eyes from the sun and don't smoke.

Have regular eye check-ups.

Where can I find more information and support?

- You can speak to your local pharmacist, optometrist, GP or the person who prescribed the medication to you
- You can get help and information from the Macular Society www.macularsociety.org/
- The Patient and Client Council can also offer support and advice: <http://www.patientclientcouncil.hscni.net/> or call 0800 917 0222.

<http://niformulary.hscni.net/DePres/PDF/Patient%20information%20-%20Changes%20to%20lutein%20and%20antioxidant%20supplements%20prescribing.pdf>