

To: Trust Chief Executives
Trust Medical Directors
Trust Heads of Pharmacy

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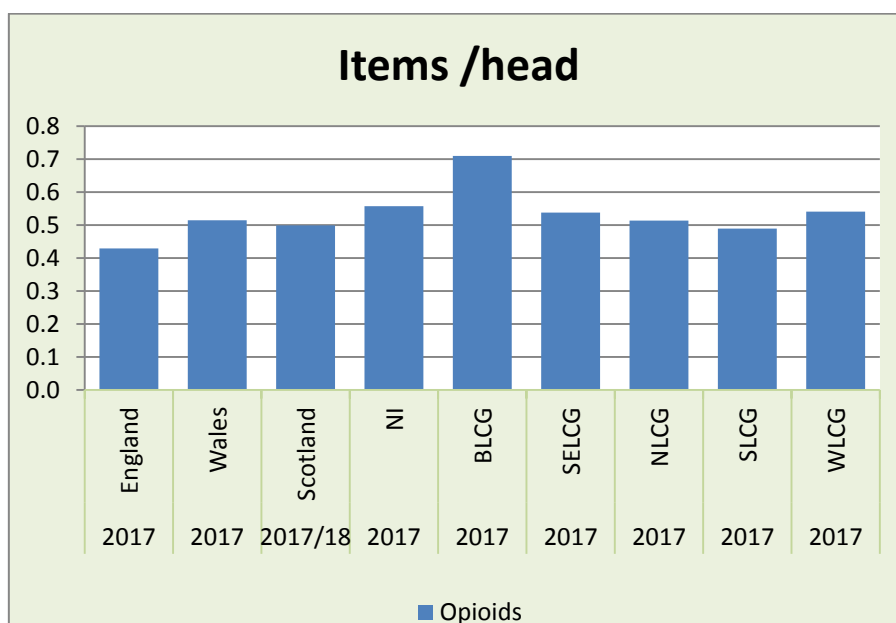
20th September 2018

Dear Colleague

OPIOID PRESCRIBING

I firstly wish to thank you for all the work undertaken to date in supporting HSCB in promoting the safe and effective prescribing of medicines including strong opioids.

The prescription of strong opioids is highest in NI compared to other UK countries:



HSCB is taking a number of actions to address the issues and potential risks associated with strong opioid prescribing. As part of this, we would like to engage with secondary care colleagues to ensure consistency of

appropriate prescribing of strong opioids across primary and secondary care.

In particular I wish to draw your attention to the following key points:

- Morphine remains the first line choice of strong opioid across N.Ireland – see HSCB letter (appendix 1) and NI Formulary guidance [here](#).
- Prescribing of other opioids, and in particular oxycodone should be by exception.
- The maximum daily dose of oral morphine for non-palliative patients should not exceed 120mg <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/faculty-of-pain-medicine/opioids-aware>.
- HSCB Implementation support tool has recently been updated to reflect The Royal College of Anaesthetists, Faculty of Pain Medicine advice that **‘the risk of harm increases substantially at doses above an oral morphine equivalent of 120mg/day but there is no increased benefit’**¹: http://niformulary.hscni.net/Formulary/Adult/PDF/Opioids_in_Chronic_Pain.pdf.

I would therefore ask that you:

- Review all prescribing protocols to ensure recommendations, both inpatient and discharge, are consistent with both the HSC “Morphine first” policy and the recommendations from the Royal College of Anaesthetists contained in Opioids Aware¹ that the maximum daily dose of oral morphine for non-palliative patients should not exceed 120mg.
- Review discharge policies and procedures to ensure clear information is provided both to GPs and patients regarding the continued use of analgesia e.g. timeframe for GP to review the patient, likely duration of analgesia required.

Communication has also been issued to colleagues in Primary Care and may be viewed at <http://www.hscboard.hscni.net/our-work/integrated-care/pharmacy-and-medicines-management/correspondence-pharmacy-medicines-management/>.

Your help in supporting this important work is greatly appreciated.

¹ Royal College of Anaesthetists - Faculty of Pain Management: Opioids Aware Resources <https://www.rcoa.ac.uk/faculty-of-pain-medicine/opioids-aware>

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Brogan', written in a cursive style.

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

Enc. Appendix 1- "Morphine First":