

To:  
GPs for cascade to all prescribers in  
the practice, including locums  
Community Pharmacists  
Trust Medical Directors for onward  
cascade as appropriate  
Trust Heads of Pharmacy and  
Medicines Management

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13<sup>th</sup> December 2018

Dear Colleague

**VSL#3 REMOVED FROM DRUG TARIFF ACBS LIST  
(1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2018)**

I am writing to reiterate the HSC Board's policy on prescribing of probiotics (e.g. VSL#3® Vivomixx®, etc.) and the Advisory Committee Borderline Substances (ACBS) guidance.

The HSC Board recommends that probiotics (and other borderline products) should only be prescribed for their listed ACBS indication.

The Advisory Committee Borderline Substances (ACBS) **removed VSL#3® from the borderline substances list on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2018** and this has been communicated to practitioners by the company. VSL#3® will still be available through direct purchase as a food supplement in pharmacies.

The ACBS now **only list Vivomixx® for the indication of “antibiotic induced remission of ileoanal pouchitis” and prescribing on the NHS should therefore be restricted to this indication.** Probiotics including VSL#3®, Vivomixx®, etc. do not currently have an ACBS indication for the treatment of lactose intolerance, irritable bowel syndrome, inflammatory bowel disease or any other conditions.

If the companies who produce probiotics wish to have their products included in the ACBS list for specific indications then they need to submit an application to the ACBS committee stating the evidence to support their application. Until then, these products should not be supplied on prescription other than for the current ACBS indication which exists for Vivomixx® only.

## **ACTION FOR TRUSTS**

- With the exception of the ACBS approved indication for Vivomixx®, advise patients to purchase probiotics OTC, if appropriate. However, ensure patients understand there is a lack of evidence supporting a benefit of probiotics in any other indication. GPs should not be asked to prescribe probiotics in circumstances where their use is not allowable within the health service.

## **ACTION FOR GPs**

- Review all patients currently prescribed probiotics: check the indications for using a probiotic.
- With the exception of the ACBS approved indication for Vivomixx®, advise patients to purchase probiotics OTC, if they wish to try them. However, ensure patients understand there is a lack of evidence supporting a benefit of probiotics in any other indication.
- Regularly review effectiveness of Vivomixx® in those patients who meet the ACBS criteria. Consider stopping therapy where there is insufficient clinical benefit.

## **ACTION FOR COMMUNITY PHARMACISTS**

- Community pharmacists and dispensary staff should be aware of this advice and reinforce it when speaking to patients to ensure a consistent message is provided.

If you have any queries regarding this letter, please contact your local Pharmacy Adviser or Andrea Linton ([andrea.linton@hscni.net](mailto:andrea.linton@hscni.net)).

Yours sincerely,



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

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