

To:  
Chief Executives of HSC Trusts  
(for cascade to relevant staff)  
General Practitioners  
Community Pharmacists

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Monday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2010

Dear Colleague

## **PRESCRIBING AND SUPPLY OF GLUCOSAMINE AND GLUCOSAMINE/CHONDROITIN COMBINATIONS PRODUCTS**

The purpose of this letter is to advise all prescribers working for the Health Service in Northern Ireland that evidence for use of glucosamine and glucosamine/chondroitin products is limited. It is therefore recommended that such products should no longer be prescribed on the Health Service.

Guidance advising on the lack of efficacy of glucosamine products was previously issued as part of the Clinical Guidance on the Care and Management of Osteoarthritis in Adults by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and was endorsed by the DHSSPS in January 2009 (<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc-sqsd-nice-06-09-cg-59-osteoarthritis.doc>).

NICE has established that while some patients may derive limited symptomatic benefit it is not cost effective to prescribe and supply such products using health service funding.

A recent study, published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ 2010;341:c4675) provides findings that endorse this approach in that there is no benefit over placebo with regard to joint pain or impact on joints.

The Health and Social Care Board established the Medicines Management Forum to review the way medicines were being managed across the HSC and at a recent meeting it considered this information. The consensus was that based on available evidence, glucosamine products should no longer be available on the Health Service.

In Northern Ireland, we currently spend £2million on glucosamine products. Given that there is little evidence for its effectiveness, the Health Service could reinvest that resource into other elements of care which have clear evidence based outcomes.

I would be grateful if you could review prescribing policies in your organisation and make any necessary changes paying due regard to managing the transition for patients and their carers. Glucosamine products are available to purchase over the counter should an individual wish to continue its use.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joe Brogan', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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

Cc Dr N Morrow  
Dr M McCarthy  
Dr M McBride  
Dr C Harper  
Patient and Client Council  
Pharmaceutical Contractors Committee  
NI General Practitioners Committee