

To: All Community Pharmacies

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Dear Colleague

RE: Patient counselling and generic medications

An issue has been raised by the Patient and Client Council of Northern Ireland that some patients, particularly the elderly, are experiencing confusion when they receive their supplies of generic medication from community pharmacies. The confusion is occurring because the appearance of their dispensed medication may change from one prescription to the next, as a result of pharmacists supplying generic medicines from different manufacturers whose products vary in appearance and packaging.

As you will be aware, the Department of Health (DHSSPS) policy in Northern Ireland is that all GP practices should prescribe, where appropriate, medicines by their generic name. As community pharmacists are responsible for sourcing generic medicines, the generic product that is dispensed is outside of the control of the HSCB or DHSSPS.

We have written to the MHRA to make them aware of this issue, and to seek their views on steps that could be taken to resolve this situation, but in the meantime I would encourage you to take steps to ensure that patients who are receiving dispensed generic medicines are not confused. Please note the following:

(i) Patient Counselling

It is important that when all medications especially generics, are dispensed, pharmacists provide patients with sufficient information and advice to enable the safe and effective use of the prescribed medicines^{1, 2}.

(ii) Purchasing generic products which are consistent in appearance

Where possible, you should consider purchasing generics which are similar in appearance (colour, size and shape) to each other across drug entities. It is appreciated that this may not always be possible, and where it is not, extra steps should be taken to ensure that patients are provided with an explanation of the medication they have been provided with². Other practical measures to reduce confusion should also be considered, e.g. do not use a "mix" of medicines from

different generic houses to fill one prescription. This is particularly important with vulnerable patients such as the elderly.

If you have any queries relating to this, please contact a member of the Medicines Management Team in your local office.

Yours sincerely

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

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

¹ PSNI Professional Standards and Guidance for the safe and supply of medicines.
June 2009

² Making it better through Pharmacy in the Community 2015, Chapter 1,
Paragraph 17-18