Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care System

NHS Hertfordshire and West Essex Integrated Care Board

Hertfordshire & West Essex Integrated Care System Position statement on Generic prescribing

Generic prescribing supporting statement

'Hertfordshire and West Essex (HWE) supports the routine prescribing of medicines by their **generic names**, except in limited circumstances where prescribing by brand is clinically appropriate and necessary for patient safety. Where a branded product is prescribed for a patient by a HWE provider clinician, this is most often due to familiarity with the brand name rather than an intention for branded supply and HWE specialists agree it is appropriate for primary care prescribers to routinely switch to a generic product. For example, HWE Consultant Ophthalmologists support the use of generic eyedrops.'

Why does generic prescribing matter?

- **Improves patient safety** – reduces prescribing and dispensing errors by using a single recognised generic medicine name
- **Supports continuity of care** – consistent naming across hospitals, GPs, and pharmacies prevents confusion
- **Ensures reliable supply** – pharmacists can dispense any available generic, avoiding delays due to brand shortages
- **Delivers better value** – generics are usually more cost effective and supports NHS value-based prescribing
- **Reduces unwarranted variation** – aligns prescribing with local formulary and national guidance and ensures equitable care
- **Improves patient understanding** – patients learn the actual drug name, supporting safer use across different care settings

Guidance for Prescribers

- **Default Position:** Prescribe all medicines generically unless a clear clinical or safety rationale exists for specifying a brand, refer to guidance if unsure. The expectation is that all prescribers across HWE will support generic prescribing and that brand prescribing will not be routinely undertaken unless there is a specific, clinical or safety reason for doing so, which is clearly stated on clinical documentation
- **Branded prescribing:** In some cases, medicines may be prescribed by brand name because these are better known. In most cases there is no clinical reason for branded supply and provider trusts agree that generic products may be substituted by primary care.
- **Temporary supply issues or shortages**: where a brand is temporarily prescribed due to supply disruption, issue as acute only, and revert to generic prescribing once back in stock
- **Hospital Discharge:** If a patient leaves hospital with a branded prescription, HWE supports switching to the generic equivalent unless otherwise stipulated for clinical or safety reasons. Any switch in medication should be communicated to the patient and the community pharmacy
- **Starting New Medication:** If a medication is referred to by brand on initiation, prescribe it generically unless otherwise stipulated or clinically justified. Refer to local guidance on brand-specific prescribing
- **Medication Review:** Review patients on branded or branded generics; where clinically appropriate, switch to the generic equivalent where clinically appropriate to support safety, consistency, and cost-effectiveness.

In summary, clinically unnecessary brand prescribing limits the efficient use of NHS resources, while frequent changes to medication can confuse patients and undermine confidence; by contrast, generic prescribing supports long-term value-based care and minimises disruption to treatment.

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