

**Charnwood Community Medical Group
Patients' Participation Group**

***'A big pill to swallow'*
REPORT of the Medicines Wastage Project Team**

Remit: In October 2018 a project team from the PPG embarked upon an investigation to examine the huge annual £300 million national wastage of prescribed medicines in the UK. *'A big pill to swallow'*! – every penny spent on wastage medicine being money the NHS could spend on vital services. We have had eight meetings of the team.

Our remit was to identify and recommend to the Practice Partners any affordable and sustainable means of reducing this wastage within their local responsibilities. Were there any initiatives already planned or in progress to tackle this in the West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group that we could support and assist with? Are our patients on regular medicines personally managing the reordering process satisfactorily?

We had in mind that the NHS England's annual budget (2017) was some £125 billion for around 66 million people. A £300 million saving could pay....

- for over 100,000 more knee replacements
 - over 80,900 hip replacements
 - over 19,000 more drug treatment courses for breast cancer
 - over 11,000 more community nurses
 - over 300,000 more drug treatment courses for Alzheimer's
- [source –*Leicestershire & Rutland local pharmaceutical committee*]

Investigation Team Strategy. We consulted a number of expert health professionals/organisations with responsibilities for patients in primary care and involved in the prescribing/ordering/dispensing of repeat medicines for patients.

**1. A GENERAL PRACTITIONER'S VIEW
Dr. Rebecca Dempsey**

General Practitioner and Practice Lead for Prescribing, Charnwood Community Medical Group.

- Dr Dempsey kindly addressed the project team on the subject of **medicines wastage**, and in particular focusing on repeat ordering and the serious level of wastage in the UK. We are most grateful for her very helpful contribution to our study. She informed us that around 50% of the Practice's patients take regular medication. The number on repeat-prescribing is 5314 linked to some 10-15 pharmacies supplying them. Registered patients with CCMG in March 2019 was 12450 and increasing.
- We discussed the **contentious issue** of wastage caused by *Third-Party* ordering that had already come to our attention from a pharmacist. However we heard encouraging news from Dr Dempsey.... the West Leicestershire Commissioning Group had already terminated it for appliances supply.

- **Third-party Ordering** is the practice of some pharmacies when ordering repeat medicines/appliances to do so without pre-ordering/consultation with the patient; a serious cause of over-ordering wastage and stockpiling. Repeat medicines are not managed by the patient ...but by the pharmacist concerned. Dr Dempsey gave us more encouraging news.... She advised us that the practice of third-party ordering of medicines will also be disallowed by our CCG in the near future, except for certain groups eg. vulnerable unsupported patients.
- As a GP she was convinced that change will necessitate more **education and guidance** to inform patients on the best ways of efficiently obtaining repeat prescriptions . The focus needed to be on patients being made confident that *they are managing their own drugs*.....not another party.
Could be in the form of leaflet handouts, the medical centres' TV screens, posters, on-line notification. On prescriptions ..
- Dr Dempsey informed us that **on-line ordering** of medicines/appliances is a growing practice in this internet age. The Practice supports it but feels our patients will need to be given more information, assistance and guidance.. Not all their registered patients have internet facilities or want to use it, in particular the frail and elderly, the vulnerable and unsupported patients. See above.
- She felt that patients needed to made fully aware as to what they should safely do with **unwanted/unused medicines**, and not stockpile them in their homes or put them in the refuse bag! . All pharmacists accept such unused items and arrange disposal. None can now be used elsewhere... NHS instruction. The pharmacies destroy the packaging and patient identification and then have the contents destroyed by the CCG. The NHS provides guidance for patients on the internet how some drugs can be disposed of in the patient's home.
- **Regular Reviews** of a patient's medicines are carried out by the GPs, the frequency depending on the type of medicine being taken and the patient's health conditions, 6-12 months frequency is the norm. This helps to reduce the wastage and divert public funding to better use. Reviews can be carried out on request too by a patient's pharmacist.
- We asked Dr Dempsey about the usefulness of **Dosette Boxes**. The NHS has information on the internet on managing our medicines, and mentions the use of pill organisers obtainable from pharmacies. Known as *Dosette Boxes* they have separate compartments for days of the week or times of the day. They help in taking medicine on the right day and the right time. Pharmacies make up these secure boxes for approved patients.

2. A PHARMACIST'S VIEW

The Project Team invited a local dispensing pharmacist to address us with a focus on medicine wastage in Primary Care. We much appreciated his helpful contribution and information for our study. His pharmacy is currently linked with 15 GP Medical Practices, mainly in Loughborough.

- **The repeat-ordering process** normally used in his pharmacy is as follows....
 - Patient repeat orders received - in person or by telephone, pharmacy sends to GP paper repeat-order,
 - GP examines/endorse/returns to pharmacy, by electronic or paper means,
 - pharmacy dispenses,
 - medicine collected by / delivered to patient.

All processed within 2-3 working days..

- **Patient's nominated pharmacy** has full record of medicines/appliances dispensed/ supplied at that pharmacy. Third-Party ordering lacks patient's own control of needs. Some action needed to remove / reduce that system that is a serious cause of over- stocking by many patients nationally. Increasing number of CCG s are terminating it. Appliance repeats by third-party ordering have recently been prohibited by the West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group.
- **Pharmacist** is available to advise and give guidance on medicines, minor ailments and conduct individual reviews of patient's medications. NHS encourages this.
- **Patients' unused/unwanted medicines.** Accepted by pharmacist and processed for disposal; packaging shredded, all personal details of patients destroyed CCG collects and destroys.
No unused/unwanted drugs may be recycled for use elsewhere – NHS regulation.
- **Process patients can take** to best manage their repeat-prescription needs....
 - sign up at GP surgery for electronic prescription.
 - try to have all drugs synchronised...doset boxes (secure containers made up by pharmacy) useful for some patients eg frail elderly, those unable to manage their medication, in Care Homes. Can cause more waste when new medication introduced.
 - know/understand their medication; if in doubt, ask pharmacist or GP.
 - oppose 'third-party' ordering, refuse to be part of it -- '*control your own medicines*'.
 - don't stockpile, it's a big waste of public money.
 - return unused medication to pharmacy
 - message for patients – '*only order what you need and when you need it!*'
- The pharmacist left us with copies of NHS publications, '*Pharmaceutical Waste In the NHS*' (2011) and '*Reducing Waste Throughout the Patient's Journey*' (2015)

3. Hinckley and Bosworth Medical Alliance & PPG.

- Members of the Project Team, went to Hinckley to discuss the recent MA & PPG initiatives tackling the wastage of medicines
- GPs very supportive of their intentions – the WLCCG however felt it was '*not the right time*' for the Hinckley group to proceed with it.
- Undeterred, they proceeded believing that the wastage problem was 'huge' and there was a big need to raise patient awareness without delay.
- Publicity at all medical centres and *awareness days* – GPs assisted with funding – local Practices have identified encouraging results. Third-Party ordering of repeat medicines was terminated in their area.

4. Patients' Survey at Charnwood CMG

- We organised a patients' survey with the objective of obtaining the Practice's patients' experience of ordering their repeat medicines. Using a questionnaire it was conducted at two of the medical centres – Rosebery and Outwoods - during the week 11-15 February by members of the PPG. Questionnaires also sent to On-Line Virtual PPG members inviting their participation.

Analysis and conclusions

382 surveys were completed either on paper or on line.

The way that it was constructed provided us with very little actual data; however, it gave us rather alarming insights into what patients do with their unwanted medicines.

- 60/382 – 16% put unused medicines in the general waste (landfill)
- 3/382 – 1% put them in the recycling
- 14/382 - 4% flushed them down the toilet
- 6/382 – 2% washed them down the sink
- 237/382 – 62% returned their medicines to the pharmacy for them to dispose of.
- This is encouraging, as 62% of our patients were doing the right thing.

The exercise, although flawed, did give patients the opportunity to review their approach to their medication, which is a positive thing.

5. MOL & POD initiatives

Our attention had been drawn to initiatives of a number of CCGs around the country concerned to tackle the severe wastage of prescribed medicines. Derbyshire CCGs had introduced **MOLs** – *Medicine Ordering Line* -- aimed at reducing their £6million yearly wastage in their county! .

- Other CCGs in the country have launched the same system, but called **PODs –Prescription Ordering Direct**. *‘A new and convenient way to order your repeat prescription’*.
- In all cases telephone call-centres have been set up (in Ilkeston for Derbyshire) for all participating GP Practices – trained health care staff on duty – have access to all patient records – provide advice and assist - send re-order to patient’s GP for endorsement - GP sends to nominated pharmacy for dispensing. Particularly useful to frail elderly and supported patients etc who appreciate contact with a pharmacist. No internet facility required by patients. Attractive publicity provided for scheme.
- GPs report success – reducing their work loads. Most CCGs in the UK have losses of £1-2 million from wastage of medicines. MOL & POD savings reported. Patient satisfaction high. Particularly helpful to needs of patients with no internet facility, but appreciating contact with ‘an expert’ without troubling their GP.
- We spoke to the CCG about MOL and POD initiatives but the practice hasn’t been adopted because at the moment, it isn’t financially viable.

6. West Leicestershire Clinical Commissioning Group

The project team’s wish from the beginning was to not proceed with any recommendations for action and initiatives that might conflict or duplicate future plans and action of the WLCCG to reduce the wastage in patient reordering of medicines in their area of Leicestershire.

- The senior pharmacist of the medicines optimisation team at the WLCCG addressed the 7 February PPG meeting on the subject of repeat ordering wastage and issues the Project Team had already heard about from our consultations and investigations.
- The pharmacist told the PPG that literature was available from the NHS to help patients manage their drugs better and avoid waste, and on-line ordering was the preferred ordering method. Third-party ordering would soon be terminated, as Dr Dempsey and a local pharmacist had already intimated to the project team. There was no indication to the PPG of an imminent CCG plan of action.

Consequently, we wrote to the WLCCG on 27 February requesting some indication of the CCGs plans and timing to deal with the wastage crisis, so that we could include the details in our report..

- On 4th April 2019 a reply was received indicating that a major plan is to commence on 30 June. GPs were being delivered leaflets/posters in that first week of April for patients information of radical changes.. The PPGs Network meeting in Leicester with the CCG was addressed about the changes on 4th April 2019

- Key elements of changes from 30 June..... Third-Party reordering will terminate on 30 June. Main method of all reordering by patients will be 'on-line' to GP surgeries. No further ordering at patient's own pharmacy allowed. Exemptions in new scheme for GP approved patients with special needs. The GPs will decide who is eligible for an exemption. All ordering at GP medical centres after 30th June 2019 will be by post or in person.

7. Conclusions and recommendations.

1. That the CCG produces an urgent roll – out plan for implementation (June 30th cut-off date) and publicity material to offer to Practices and pharmacist. Materials might include publicity about online services and the NHS app.
2. The Practice displays the information in the seated areas of the waiting rooms.
3. The Practice might consider having a named person (who might be a PPG member) to answer queries from patients about the new ordering procedures.
4. The Practice should make staff (GP, nurse, receptionists) aware that there will be patients who are nervous about on line ordering or do not have the facilities and be prepared to support them.
5. The Practice should encourage patients to identify a designated pharmacy for repeat prescriptions.

8. Acknowledgements

We are grateful to all those who have given their time to help us with this project

J R T
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