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|  | Behavioural Insights Team  Skipton House  80 London Road  London, SE1 6LH |  | T +44 (0)20 7000 1234  F +44 (0)20 7000 1234  [www.gov.uk/phe](http://www.gov.uk/phe) |

For: NHS Improvement/ NHS England PrescQIPP AMS Hub

March 2018

# Re: Chief Medical Officer letters to antibiotic prescribers – sent March 2018

Improving antibiotic stewardship is a priority for Public Health England due to the continuing threat of antimicrobial resistance. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for England is sending her annual feedback letter on antibiotic prescribing rates to GPs in March 2018. A copy of the TARGET ‘Treating Your Infection patient information leaflet’ is also enclosed and practices are encouraged to work with their CCG prescribing advisors

The feedback letters are being sent to (see below for more details):

1. Over 6,300 individual GPs in over 1,400 different GP practices with high antibiotic prescribing rates as in previous years.
2. Half of almost 2,400 individual GPs in over 900 different GP practices with antibiotic prescribing rates that have increased year-on-year. This is being run as a randomised controlled trial to test whether it is effective in supporting GPs to improve their antibiotic stewardship.
3. GP practices with high antibiotic prescribing rates

Practices were selected if their level of prescribing was in the top 20% antibacterial Items per STAR-PU for the twelve months (Oct 2016 –Sep 2017) similarly to previous years. There are three main letters (1, 2, and 3) that have been tailored according to GP practice prescribing rate and change in prescribing over time (Table 1). The letters have also been tailored to acknowledge whether the GP practice had received a CMO letter previously.

The letters thank GPs who are already reducing their prescribing rates. The letters are designed to support GPs to improve their antibiotic stewardship by providing feedback on practice prescribing rates, offering encouragement and suggesting practical actions clearly and succinctly. Public Health England’s Behavioural Insights Team manages the process.

Copies of all 6 letters are posted on the AMS Hub with an Excel spreadsheet (TOP20PRACTICES.csv) containing details of all practices that have been sent letters. Note the letters suggest the prescribers do contact their CCG prescribing advisers for antimicrobial stewardship support.

Table 1. Allocation and tailoring of CMO letters to high antibiotic prescribers

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| **Group** | **Performance in the Last 12mths** | **Variance from 2016/17** | **Category** | **Headline Message** | **Secondary Message** | **Count of practices** | **Count of GPs** |
| High rate, have increased since 13/14 | Top 20% | Increase | Letter 1 | Your practice is amongst the 20% highest prescribers of antibiotics nationally | The great majority (80%) of practices in England prescribe fewer antibiotics per head than yours. Most other practices have reduced their prescribing rates since 2013/14 but yours has increased. | 398 (87 have received a letter previously) | 1788 (500 have received a letter previously) |
| High rate, have decreased since 13/14 | Top 20% (exclusive of top 10%) | Decrease | Letter 2 | Your practice is amongst the 20% highest prescribers of antibiotics nationally | The great majority (80%) of practices in England prescribe fewer antibiotics per head than yours. | 519 (269 have received a letter previously) | 2555 (1803 have received a letter previously) |
| Very high rate, have decreased since 13/14 | Top 10% | Decrease | Letter 3 | Your practice is amongst the 10% highest prescribers of antibiotics nationally | The great majority (90%) of practices in England prescribe fewer antibiotics per head than yours. | 497 (351 have received a letter previously) | 2038 (1820 have received a letter previously) |

Evidence to support this intervention comes from a randomised controlled trial that Public Health England ran in 2014/15 to test the effect of sending feedback to GPs where practice prescribing rates were in the top 20% of each NHS Area Team (LANCET Vol 387, No. 10029, p1743). The trial found that practices that were sent a supportive feedback letter prescribed 3.3% fewer antibiotics than practices that did not receive a letter.

In Jan 2016 and March 2017 similar letters were sent to all GPs in practices where prescribing rates were in the top 20% nationally (NHS Local Area Teams no longer existed).

1. GP practices with increasing antibiotic prescribing rates

This year, the CMO is also writing a supportive feedback letter to encourage practices whose prescribing has increased by more than 4% year-on-year (comparing Oct 2015-Sep 2016 to Oct 2016-Sep 2017) to improve their antibiotic stewardship. Public Health England’s Behavioural Insights Team is sending the letters on behalf of the CMO to half of these practices in a randomised controlled trial (practice-level data shown in Excel file: INCREASE\_RATE\_PRACTICES.csv). GPs in half of the practices will receive Letter 4 (Table 2) and we will investigate how prescribing rates in those practices compares with the practices that did not receive a letter. This trial excludes practices with prescribing rates in the top 20% as they are already sent a letter as described above. It also excludes practices with prescribing rates in the lowest 5% as numbers of items are low and potentially highly variable. Only 30 GPs in this group (intervention and control combined) had been sent a letter previously, so we did not tailor these letters accordingly.

Table 2. Allocation of CMO letters to prescribers with increasing prescribing rates

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| **Group** | **Performance in the Last 12mths** | **Variance from 2016/17** | **Category** | **Headline Message** | **Secondary Message** | **Count of practices** | **Count of GPs** |
| Have increased prescribing by more than 4% | 20-95% | Increase | Letter 4 | Antibiotic prescribing rates in your practice have increased | The great majority (80%) of practices in England reduced or stabilised their antibiotic prescribing rates in 2016/17. However, your practice is in the minority that have increased their prescribing by more than 4%. | 930 | 2340 |

If CCGs have any questions please contact:

Elizabeth Beech | National Project Lead - Healthcare Acquired Infection and Antimicrobial Resistance

[Elizabeth.beech@nhs.net](mailto:Elizabeth.beech@nhs.net) | W [improvement.nhs.uk](http://www.improvement.nhs.uk/)

Skipton House Area 6C, 80 London Road, London,SE1 6LH

NHS Improvement