The Chief Medical Officer for England is sending her annual feedback letter on antibiotic prescribing rates to GPs in March 2018. The letters thank GPs who are already reducing their usage of antibiotics. The letters are designed to support GPs to improve their antibiotic stewardship by providing clear feedback on practice prescribing rates, offering encouragement and suggesting practical actions in a clear and succinct manner. Public Health England’s Behavioural Insights Team manages the process.

The Chief Medical Officer is writing to individual GPs working in practices that are prescribing high rates of antibiotics – those in the top 20% based on antibacterial items per STAR-PU in the year from October 2016-September 2017. The CMO is also writing to GPs in half of the practices whose prescribing rates have increased by more than 4% year-on-year (comparing Oct 2015-Sep 2016 to Oct 2016-Sep 2017) in a randomised controlled trial. This trial excludes practices with prescribing rates in the top 20% and those in the lowest 5%. Practices will receive letters similar to the samples copied below.

A copy of the TARGET ‘Treating Your Infection’ patient information leaflet is also enclosed with the letter to support consultation between prescribers and patient. Clinicians are also encouraged to work on antibiotic stewardship with their CCG prescribing advisors.

Clearly more recent prescribing data is available at the local level (there is a substantial lag at national level), and some practices may have made significant reductions in their prescribing since September 2017.

The evidence-based letter to the top 20% of prescribers has been implemented in each of the last two years by Public Health England’s Behavioural Insights Team following a randomised controlled trial they carried out by the team in 2014. In contrast, the letter to other GPs who have increased their prescribing is a new trial.

Learning from the initial trial, the implementation team are sharing information about the intervention, the practices involved, and a copy of a letter with CCGs in a timely manner, and are very aware that many CCG teams are working to support the appropriate prescribing and use of antibiotics in primary care.