

Medicines adherence and waste

This briefing is part of the [PrescQIPP adherence and waste webkit](#), which includes tools such as a project planning document, webinars, prevent medicines waste campaigns and public and professional materials, for example, posters, leaflets, animations and media messages.

Key recommendations

- Due to the complexity of the causes of medicines wastage, a multifaceted and long-term approach across all healthcare sectors is required.
- An extensive social marketing and communication strategy is essential.
- Encourage engagement and partnership working with other third sector organisations such as Age UK, Healthwatch, voluntary groups and local councils.
- Engage with:
 - » Key stakeholders such as community pharmacists, GP practices, GP receptionists and prescription clerks, secondary care, care homes, local community services and multidisciplinary groups and patient participation groups to support a reduction in medicine waste and improve medicine adherence.
 - » The local fire service to distribute promotional materials within their organisation and also to be integrated into their home fire check visits, sometimes called "Safe and Well visits". This supports the distribution of promotional materials to a wider cohort of people.
 - » Local school children to promote key messages to prevent medicines waste, via competitions, talks and distributing promotional materials.
- Consider service redesign and process change for ordering repeat prescriptions. See the [PrescQIPP adherence and waste webkit](#) for examples.
- Implement the recommendations on optimising medicines use. These are discussed in the NICE guideline 'Medicines Optimisation: the safe and effective use of medicines to enable the best possible outcomes'. See the National guidance section of this briefing and the PrescQIPP bulletin for further details.
- Promote the use of the 'My Medications Passport' app developed by the Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care (CLAHRC) for North West London (NWL) in collaboration with Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust. A downloadable app for Android or iPhone/iPad can be obtained from app stores and is available free of charge.
- Consider the use of Electronic Prescription Service (EPS), electronic Repeat Dispensing (eRD) or Serial Prescriptions (NHS Scotland) to support the reduction of medicines waste.

Background

In 2019/2020 the NHS in England and Wales spent £9.794 billion on medicines in primary care, it is estimated that medicines worth over £350 million are wasted each year.¹⁻



⁴ The estimated avoidable drug wastage for Scotland is between £12 million and £18 million a year.⁵ A major concern relating to adherence and waste is that patients may not be experiencing the intended outcomes of their prescribed treatment. Improving adherence in medicines taking can improve health outcomes. Causes of waste include repeat/habitual dispensing, stock piling/over-ordering, patient recovery/change of medication, patient death, prescription durations, incorrect disposal, patient non-adherence.¹ NHS Health Boards in Scotland found an additional cause for medicines waste was the abolition of the prescription charges.⁵

National guidance

- The Department of Health - [Action plan for improving the use of medicines and reducing waste](#) (2012)
- The Royal Pharmaceutical Society document - [Keeping patients safe when they transfer between care providers - getting the medicines right](#) (2012)
- The Royal Pharmaceutical Society produced a guide [Medicines optimisation: Helping patients make the most of medicines](#) to support the medicines optimisation agenda (2013)
- NICE guidance - [Medicines Optimisation: the safe and effective use of medicines to enable the best possible outcomes](#), identifies key areas for improvement and developing a patient centred approach to taking medication (2015)

References

1. NHS England. Pharmaceutical waste reduction in the NHS. Version 1. June 2015. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/pharmaceutical-waste-reduction.pdf>
2. NHS Digital. Prescribing Costs in Hospitals and the Community 2019-2020. November 2020. <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/prescribing-costs-in-hospitals-and-the-community/2019-2020>
3. Welsh Government 2020. Prescriptions in Wales, 2019-20. Statistical First Release SFR 147/2020. September 2020. <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2020-09/prescriptions-wales-april-2019-march-2020-610.pdf>
4. NHS Wales. Health in Wales. Major campaign aims to save millions by reducing wasted medicines. 14 September 2010. <https://www.wales.nhs.uk/news/17032>
5. Audit Scotland. Prescribing in general practice in Scotland. January 2013. https://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/docs/health/2013/nr_130124_gp_prescribing.pdf

Additional resources available	 Bulletin	https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-294-medicines-adherence-and-waste/
	 Tools	

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