Good prescribing - ensuring appropriate polypharmacy

This briefing supports the 'Ensuring appropriate polypharmacy' flowchart. It has been designed to support decision making at different stages of prescribing and medication review. The flowchart shows the steps in the process to engage patients fully in decisions about their treatment. Examples of key considerations at each step are provided.¹

Key recommendations

- When either prescribing a new treatment or deciding to deprescribe an existing treatment, prescribers should weigh up risk vs. benefit of the treatment, magnitude of expected benefit, net expected benefit, time to expected benefit, frailty and life expectancy.
- For all prescriptions, the prescriber must make sure that suitable arrangements are in place for monitoring, follow-up and review.
- Agree with the person the expected outcomes and time period of treatment upon initiation of treatment.
- Upon initiation of a new medicine and at a regular medication review, patients and/or their carers should be made aware of the likely adverse drug events (ADEs) to look out for and they should know what to do if they experience them.
- Prescribers should be aware of ADEs requiring review and possible substitution of therapy and be cautious about distinguishing them from a new disease to be treated with a new medication, which can result in the development of problematic polypharmacy or a prescribing cascade.

Figure 1. Ensuring appropriate polypharmacy tool Before initial treatment Agree treatment targets with patient Consider alternative approaches Consider: and/or carer Consider: Life expectancy Examples include: Lifestyle change(s) Frailty Primary prevention Self care (OTC medicines) Time to benefit Symptom control for acute problems Non-pharmacological options Net benefit Outcome expected Magnitude of benefit Stopping criteria Risk vs. benefit Required tests Agree time period of treatment(s) Benefit not achieved Defined short period with action Discuss treatment options Risk increases or benefit decreases Expected outcomes with patient and/or carers Adverse event Continuation criteria · Prescribe an alternative if Defined treatment period reached Stopping criteria available Condition resolved Refer to community pharmacy New Non-pharmacological Stop medicine and remove to history Medicines Service (NMS) alternatives Withdraw (possibly re-introduce Coping strategies if non delivery of benefit is due to No further treatment options external factors) Planned re-assessment and Transferring to End of Life Care Medication Review Evaluate benefit to the patient Assess outcomes vs. expectations Agree continuing treatment of current medications Continuing response to treatment Discuss revised treatment Defined period with review plan Compliance with dose and objectives with patient and/or Discuss: frequency Expected outcomes Dose titration (up or down) QoF Personalised Care Continuation criteria Change in frailty Adjustment Stopping criteria Defined treatment period reached Need for tests and frequency Condition resolved

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References

1. PrescQIPP. Polypharmacy and Deprescribing—Ensuring appropriate polypharmacy tool. https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/webkits/polypharmacy-and-deprescribing/

Additional		
resources available	Tools	tps://www.prescqipp.info/news/bulletin-319-good-prescribing

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