

For: NHS England PrescQIPP AMS Hub

6th January 2016

Reducing inappropriate antibiotic usage is a priority for Public Health England due to the growing threat of antimicrobial resistance. Last winter PHE and the Behavioural Insights Team, with the support of the Department of Health, conducted a randomised controlled trial to test the impact of sending letters to GPs about their antibiotic usage.

GPs in practices with antibiotic prescribing rates in the top 20% for each NHS Area Team were targeted. Antibiotic prescribing rates were defined as number of antibacterial items dispensed per 1000 head of population, applying the STAR-PU controls for age and gender. Half of these practices were randomly assigned to the treatment group, which received a letter from the Chief Medical Officer with a social norms message. The message stated: 'The great majority (80%) of practices in [NHS Area Team] prescribe fewer antibiotics per head than yours'. The practices that were assigned to the control group did not receive any communication.

There is evidence from a variety of policy areas that people adjust their behaviour to align with the majority. This trial found that practices in the treatment group prescribed 3.3% fewer antibiotics than the control group in which GPs did not receive a letter, controlling for patient characteristics and prior prescribing levels.

This winter PHE is implementing the trial results at scale by sending a similar letter to GPs working in practices whose prescribing rate, calculated as above, was in the top 20% nationally. While many GPs are already reducing their usage of antibiotics, the letter is intended to support GPs to reduce their prescribing further by offering encouragement and suggesting practical actions.

If CCGs have any questions about this letter or the trial, please contact:

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