

Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer
Mrs Cathy Harrison, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer



HSS (MD)13/2020

For Action:

Chief Executives, Health & Social Care Board/ HSC
Trusts

Family Practitioner Service Leads, Health & Social
Care Board, (*for cascade to GP Out of
Hours services*)

GP Medical Advisers, Health & Social Care Board
All General Practitioners

GP Locums

Medical Directors, HSC Trusts (*for onward
distribution to all Consultants, gynaecology,
hepatology, A&E staff, hospital pharmacy,
and sexual health/family planning centres*)

RQIA (*for onward distribution to all independent
providers*)

Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, Health &
Social Care Board/Trusts

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Our Ref: HSS (MD)13/2020

Date: 12 March 2020

**PLEASE SEE ATTACHED FULL CIRCULATION
LIST**

Dear Colleague,

COVID-19 - MAINTAINING THE SUPPLY OF MEDICINES TO PATIENTS

This letter is to provide you with guidance on how the supplies of medicines can be managed equitably during the current COVID-19 outbreak. Patient welfare is our overriding priority and the Department can assure the public that it is working very hard to safeguard their interests.

Key messaging

- **There is no need for patients to do anything new or different when ordering or taking their medicines.**
- **Patients, hospitals, GPs, community pharmacies and care homes should not stockpile medicines.**
- **Prescribers should not increase the quantities of regular medicines prescribed for any of their patients.**
- **Prescribers should review the appropriateness of any prescriptions for quantities in excess of 56 days' supply.**

- **The Department of Health (DoH) is working closely with the other UK administrations to make sure that patients continue to receive the medicines and other medical supplies they need.**
- **Where shortages do occur the situation will be managed and, if necessary, suitable alternatives or an alternative treatment will be provided until supply is restored to normal levels.**

There are currently no medicines shortages in the UK as a result of COVID-19. The UK is well prepared to deal with the impact of COVID-19, and has strategic stockpiles of key medicines which can be drawn upon in the event of any supply issues.

In Northern Ireland the HSC already has tried and tested mitigation arrangements in place for dealing with supply disruptions to ensure that patients continue to get the medicines and medical supplies they need. We are working closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), devolved administrations in Scotland and Wales, industry and others in the supply chain to help ensure that this remains the case and that any necessary precautions are in place to reduce the likelihood of future shortages.

It remains important however that healthcare providers, including general practices, hospitals, pharmacies and care homes, should not stockpile medicines or support patients who try to stockpile as these actions may put additional strain on the medicines supply chain and exacerbate any potential shortages. Increasing the quantities of medication issued per prescription carries the risk that some patients could have a stockpile of medicines sufficient for several months while others have none, with the potential for resulting adverse effects on health at a time of increased pressure on the health service.

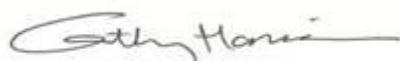
We would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Department to offer our thanks for your continued support and your dedication to patient care at this challenging time.

A copy of this letter will be available on the Department's website as well as the latest information relating to COVID-19 – <http://www.health-ni.gov.uk/coronavirus>

Yours sincerely



Dr Michael McBride
Chief Medical Officer



Mrs Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer

