

13th August 2020

Tel: 028 9536 3863
Email: FOI.BSO@hscni.net

BY EMAIL

Our Ref: FOI 1283

Your Ref: [REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]

Your request for information was received on 9th July 2020 and was dealt with under the terms of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. Please be advised that the Business Services Organisation (BSO) has now completed its search for the information you requested with regards prescribed medication to under 18 year olds.

Please accept my apologies for the delay in procuring this information.

Please find this information, below.

1. Number of paid prescriptions containing antidepressant items dispensed to persons aged under 18 years old by year and age category (0-11 and 12-17) for the period 2018 and 2019 broken down by year:

Please refer to the table below which shows the number of paid prescriptions¹ containing anti-depressant² items dispensed to persons³ aged under 18 years by year and age category:

	Under 12 Years	12 to 17 Years	Total
2018	586	12,710	13,296
2019	802	16,204	17,006

Please see footnotes in relation to increase in scanning rates for prescriptions in 2019.

2. Number of paid prescriptions containing antidepressant items dispensed to persons aged 0-11 years old by year and drug name.

Please refer to the table below which shows the number of paid prescriptions¹ containing anti-depressant² items dispensed to persons³ aged under 12 years by year and drug name:



	2018	2019
Amitriptyline	45	47
Citalopram	*	24
Fluoxetine	233	371
Sertraline	20	16
Others	288	344
Total	586	802

* included in Others

Please see footnotes in relation to increase in scanning rates for prescriptions in 2019.

3. Number of paid prescriptions containing antidepressant items dispensed to persons aged 12-17 years old by year and drug name.

Please refer to Table below which shows the number of paid prescriptions¹ containing anti-depressant² items dispensed to persons³ aged between 12 and 17 years by year and drug name:

	2018	2019
Amitriptyline	499	595
Citalopram	670	721
Escitalopram	94	167
Fluoxetine	4,211	5,180
Fluvoxamine	33	59
Imipramine	15	25
Mirtazapine	221	338
Nortriptyline	31	*
Others	36	32
Sertraline	6,770	8,980
Venlafaxine	130	107
Total	12,710	16,204

* included in Others

Please see footnotes in relation to increase in scanning rates for prescriptions in 2019.

4. The source of the prescription (i.e. GP, Psychiatrist) and the numbers prescribed by each.

BSO only process prescriptions from primary care clinicians (i.e. GPs, pharmacy prescribers or nurse prescribers). Psychiatrists, or another other secondary care clinician, do not write HS21.

The recommendation to prescribe an antidepressant may have come from a psychiatrist to the GP, but there is no way of gaining this information without an audit of individual patient's medical records. This information is not available within the BSO.

5. Number of persons aged under 18 years old who have been dispensed anti-depressants by year and age category (0-11 and 12-17). In addition, for the same periods: The number of children and young people aged under 12 years, and 12-17 prescribed antidepressant medication.

Please refer to the table below which shows the number of persons³ aged under 18 years who have been dispensed anti-depressant² items by year and age category:

	Under 12 Years	12 to 17 Years	Total
2018	137	3,018	3,155
2019	149	3,331	3,480

Please see footnotes in relation to increase in scanning rates for prescriptions in 2019.

6. Number of persons aged 0-11 years old who have been dispensed anti-depressants by year and drug type. The name of the drugs prescribed by the number of children under age 12 and 12-17 year olds in receipt of these.

Please refer to the table below for the number of persons³ aged under 12 years who have been dispensed anti-depressant² items by year and drug name:

	2018	2019
Amitriptyline	15	18
Fluoxetine	55	65
Sertraline	58	55
Others	9	11
Total	137	149

Please see footnotes in relation to increase in scanning rates for prescriptions in 2019.

7. Number of persons aged 0-18 years old who have been dispensed anti-depressants by year and drug type.

Please refer to the Table below for the number of persons³ aged between 12 and 17 years who have been dispensed anti-depressant² items by year and drug name:

	2018	2019
Amitriptyline	181	173
Citalopram	220	213
Escitalopram	33	48
Fluoxetine	1,061	1,143
Fluvoxamine	10	11
Mirtazapine	69	73
Sertraline	1,380	1,626
Venlafaxine	34	27
Others	30	17
Total	3,018	3,331

Please see footnotes in relation to increase in scanning rates for prescriptions in 2019.

8. The source of the prescription (ie GP, Psychiatrist) and the number of children age 12 and 12-17 in receipt of these.

BSO only process prescriptions from primary care clinicians (i.e. GPs, pharmacy prescribers or nurse prescribers).

Psychiatrists, or another other secondary care clinician, do not write HS21.

The recommendation to prescribe an antidepressant may have come from a psychiatrist to the GP, but there is no way of gaining this information without an audit of individual patient's medical records. This information would not be held by the BSO.

Footnotes:

¹ *The number of paid prescriptions refer to prescriptions that are prescribed in primary care and subsequently dispensed (by a Community Pharmacist, Appliance Supplier or Dispensing Doctor) and submitted to the Business Services Organisation (BSO) for payment. If a patient does not take a prescription to a dispenser and get it provided to them, then the information will not be included in the data. Prescriptions can contain more than one item.*

² *Anti-depressant items are defined as those categorised under British National Formulary (BNF) chapter 4, section 3. These are currently include Sertraline, Fluoxetine, Amitriptyline, Imipramine, Clomipramine, Surmontil, Citalopram, Anafranil, Trazodone, Phenelzine, Venlafaxine, Cipramil, Fluvoxolam, Mirtazapine, Prozac, Seroquel, Moclobemide, Molipaxin, Prothiaden, ViePax, Cymbalta, Dosulepin, Duloxetine, Efexor, Escitalopram, Lofepramine, Mianserin, Nortriptyline, Rodomel, Tonpular, Trimipramine, Venlalic, Agomelatine, Allegron, Cipralext, Edronax, Isocarboxazid, Lustral, Manerix, Nardil, Paroxetine, Triptafen, Vensir and Zispin*

³ *For numbers of prescriptions, each prescription is assigned the patient age at time of dispensing. This will include repeat dispensing where patients will be counted multiple times. For numbers of persons, patients are counted once in a given year with their minimum age at dispensing assigned.*

Additional Notes:

BSO dispensing data does not capture the indication for which the drug has been prescribed/dispensed. Therefore not all prescription items will have been dispensed for depressive illness, drugs may be prescribed for other reasons such as anorexia, neuropathic pain or obsessive compulsive disorder.

It should be noted that there are differences in prescription dispensing and processing in Northern Ireland compared to other UK regions and this should be noted if these statistics are to be used for comparative purposes to other parts of the UK. For example in Northern Ireland there is no outpatient dispensing.

Data can only be produced on age splits of patients where the prescription form has been scanned. Historically, between 10-20% of all prescription forms in any given month could not be scanned. Due to this issue all figures provided are estimates only and will be an undercount of the true number of prescriptions prescribed to patients aged under 18 in Northern Ireland.

There has been a significant improvement in the scanning rates towards the end of 2018 and during 2019 due to a refresh of the scanner's in BSO. More patients can now be identified which means we would advise against comparing the 2019 figures to previous years, as the increase in the volumes between years could be attributed to the increased scan rate.

Please also note that the overall proportion of prescriptions for antidepressant items where the patient information was *not* available was: 2017 [21%]; 2018 [25%]; 2019 [11%].

I hope that the information provided assists you. If you are dissatisfied in any way with the handling of your request, you have the right to request a review. You should do this as soon as possible or in any case within two months of the date of issue of this letter.

In the event that you require a review to be undertaken, you can do so by writing to

Information Governance Manager,
2 Franklin Street,
Belfast,
BT2 8DQ

If, following an internal review, carried out by an independent decision making panel, you remain dissatisfied in any way with the handling of the request, you may make a complaint under Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act, to the Information Commissioner's Office and ask that they investigate whether the BSO has complied with the terms of the Freedom of Information Act.

You can contact Information Commissioner at:

Website: www.ico.org.uk
Phone: 0303 123 1113
Email: casework@ico.org.uk
Post: Information Commissioner's Office
3rd Floor, 14 Cromac Place
Belfast
BT7 2JB

In most circumstances the Information Commissioner will not investigate a complaint unless an internal review procedure has been carried out. However the Commissioner has the option to investigate the matter at his discretion.

Yours Sincerely,



Karen Bailey
Acting Chief Executive