

From the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer  
Mrs Cathy Harrison



Department of  
**Health**

An Roinn Sláinte

Mánnystrie O Poustie

[www.health-ni.gov.uk](http://www.health-ni.gov.uk)

Castle Buildings

Stormont

BELFAST

BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 90 523219

Email: [cathy.harrison@health-ni.gov.uk](mailto:cathy.harrison@health-ni.gov.uk)

Date: 14 April 2023

## **FOR ACTION**

Deputy Secretary, Strategic Planning and  
Performance Group

*(for onward transmission to relevant staff)*

Chief Executive, Business Services Organisation

*(for onward transmission to relevant staff)*

Assistant Director of Integrated Care, Head of  
Pharmacy and Medicines Management, SPPG

*(for onward distribution to Community  
Pharmacies).*

Head of General Medical Services, SPPG *(for  
onward distribution to GP Practices)*

GP Medical Advisers, Strategic Planning and  
Performance Group.

Dear Colleagues,

## **SERIOUS SHORTAGE PROTOCOL – ESTRADOT® (ESTRADIOL HEMIHYDRATE) 75 MICROGRAMS/24 HOURS TRANSDERMAL PATCH**

Serious shortage protocols (SSPs) under the Human Medicines Regulations 2012 (HMRs) are an additional tool to manage and mitigate medicines shortages. An SSP enables community pharmacists to supply a specified medicine in accordance with a protocol rather than a prescription, without needing to seek authorisation from the prescriber, saving time for patients, pharmacists and prescribers. They are used in the case of a serious shortage, where a medicine would be likely to be out of stock for some time, and if, in the opinion of ministers, it would help manage the supply situation.

I am writing to inform you that in response to current disruption to the supply of Estradot® (estradiol hemihydrate) 75micrograms/24 hours transdermal patch, an SSP has been issued by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).

Effective from 13 April 2023, [SSP055](#) provides that **for every Estradot® (estradiol hemihydrate) 75micrograms/24 hours transdermal patch that is originally prescribed, 1 x Evorel® (estradiol) 75micrograms/24 hours patch can be supplied.**

This SSP, authorised by the Secretary of State on behalf of the four UK nations, has been developed by clinicians and provide pharmacists with procedures to follow in providing suitable alternative products to help reduce the number of patients having to return to their prescriber for a replacement prescription.

This SSP is due to expire on **Friday 5 May 2023**. Pharmacists should refer to the latest version of these SSPs which are now available on the Business Services Organisation (BSO) dedicated page on its website:

[www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3063.htm](http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3063.htm)

#### Key Points:

- These protocols do not allow for the quantity supplied to be less than the number of days prescribed on the original prescription. Enough packs should be supplied to cover the full duration of the course.
- For [SSP055](#), pharmacists should ensure that patients considered unsuitable for inclusion are promptly referred to their prescriber for further advice.
- Ensure that patients who are supplied in accordance with this SSP are counselled by the pharmacist with regards to monitoring and managing potential side effects, such as:
  - Vaginal ‘breakthrough bleeding’;
  - Irritation caused by wearing a different patch to one they are used to;
  - Patches coming off or not adhering properly.
- Patients who experience persistent side effects from alternative patch supplied in accordance with this SSP should be promptly referred back to their prescriber.
- Community pharmacists should use their professional skill and judgement to decide whether it is reasonable and appropriate to substitute the patient’s prescribed order for a supply under this SSP. The patient/carer will also need to agree to supply under the SSP.
- Pharmacists must ensure that the patient’s prescriber and/or GP practice is notified when supplying a patient in accordance with these SSPs as soon as practically possible, and within 3 working days. Please refer to [‘Outline of Operational Guidance for Dispensers in response to issue of a Serious Shortage Protocol’](#) on the BSO website for more information.
- If a patient/carer declines to receive the medicine under these protocols, the pharmacist should use their professional judgement to determine if other courses of action are appropriate whilst taking into consideration wider supply issues. If this does not address their concerns, the patient/carer should be referred back to their prescriber for advice.

**Action Required**

All relevant staff should be made aware of these SSP's. I would ask the SPPG to bring this information to the attention of GP Practices and Community Pharmacists directly.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cathy Harrison". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Cathy Harrison**  
**Chief Pharmaceutical Officer**