

**From the Chief Pharmaceutical Officer
Professor Cathy Harrison**



Department of
Health

An Roinn Sláinte

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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– CLARITHROMYCIN 125MG/5ML ORAL SUSPENSION – EXTENSION OF EXPIRY DATE

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.

In light of ongoing concerns regarding the availability of **clarithromycin 125mg/5ml oral suspension** across the UK, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) has today extended the expiry date of the existing SSP (**SSP053**) until **Friday 12 January 2024**.

This SSP, authorised by the Secretary of State on behalf of the four UK nations, has been developed by clinicians and provides 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.

Pharmacists should refer to the latest version of this SSP which is available on the Business Services Organisation (BSO) dedicated page on its website:

<https://bso.hscni.net/directorates/operations/family-practitioner-services/pharmacy/contractor-information/drug-tariff-and-related-materials/serious-shortage-protocols-ssps/>

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.

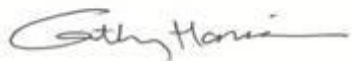
Should the quantity on the prescription be unclear, the pharmacist should consult with the patient and use their professional judgement to make an appropriate supply under this SSP. Pharmacists should refer to the relevant Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC) and Patient Information Leaflets (PIL) to inform these decisions.

If a patient/carer declines to receive the medicine under an SSP, 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 the extended expiry date of this SSP. I would ask the SPPG to bring this information to the attention of GP Practices and Community Pharmacists directly.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Cathy Harrison
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer