

Medicines Awareness

for care homes

Expiry Dates

Key points

- All medicines should be stored in a cool (below 25°C), dry place, away from direct sunlight.
- Some medicines need to be kept refrigerated at a temperature of between 2 and 8 degrees centigrade however some can be taken out of the fridge whilst in use (e.g. insulin).
- Keep medicines in their original outer packaging, to protect from sunlight
- The expiry date of products can change once opened e.g. eye drops
- Creams, ointments or liquid medicines should have the date they were opened written on the medicine package/label and if appropriate on the separate Topical Medication Application Record sheet
- Any product whose appearance suggests it may be unfit for use should be discarded irrespective of the expiry date.

Reducing waste when ordering medicines

It is estimated that around £300million pounds worth of unwanted medication is thrown away each year and that around £50million of that can be attributed to care homes¹

It is important that the member of staff responsible for ordering medicines only requests items that are needed after checking the stock. A photocopy should be taken of what has been ordered and once the prescription has been generated by the surgery it should be sent back to the home so that it can be checked for discrepancies before being sent to the Community Pharmacy to be dispensed.

Prescribed regular medicines

¹ 1 Evaluation of the Scale, Causes and Costs of Waste Medicines ©YHEC/School of Pharmacy, University of London November 2010

For further advice please contact the medicines management team at Walsall CCG

Tel. 01922 618388

Usually regular medication should be ordered every month to reduce the risk of errors. Any unused doses (for example where odd doses have been refused or not taken or where medicines have been discontinued or changed) should be disposed of appropriately at the end of the month. If there is medication to be destroyed at the end of a cycle but all the doses are signed indicating that they have been given this should be investigated.

It is acceptable to “carry over” **regular medicines** where there is a whole month’s supply left (e.g. inhalers, GTN sprays) or where failing to carry the supply over will leave a patient without medicines. NB: Eye drops have a 28 day expiry once opened and so should not be carried forward.

Infrequently used essential injections (e.g. glucagon & hydroxocobalamin) may be used up until their expiry date on the box.

When carrying forward regular medicines ***always check the expiry date on the packaging***, Monitored Dosage Systems (MDS) only have a 2 month shelf life because of concerns about medication stability.

Prescribed “when required” (prn) medicines

Where medicines are prescribed for use only ‘when required’ there must be systems in place to ensure that stock levels are kept at safe levels & to ensure medication is not given after it has expired. It is recommended that all homes develop clear, individualised, prn protocols for each prn medicine so that staff are clear about the reasons for each individual prescription.

It is difficult to predict how much prn medication a patient will need in the 28-day cycle. This can result in significant amounts of medication being destroyed, only for a replacement supply to be reordered for the following month. This costs the NHS money but it is an area in which it is possible to prevent waste if good procedures are set up and adhered to.

It is acceptable for homes to retain ‘when required’ medicines, and carry these forward onto the next MAR sheet each month.

- Medicines which have been dispensed for residents in their original packaging may be retained until the expiry date printed on the pack or strip providing that the ‘prn’ medication is being given for the original condition for which the prescription occurred.
- If “when required” medicines are dispensed into an MDS (tray) then a 2 month expiry date is given, after which the medicines will need to be re-ordered and replaced- care staff should however review the need for the dispensing of “PRN” medication into an MDS container and where possible should ask the pharmacy to dispense such medication in its original container.

Prescribed creams & ointments

Please write the DATE OPENED on all creams when opening a fresh pack

Emollients & simple barrier creams e.g. Sudocrem, Conotrane, Diprobase, Cavilon, Triple Care, Aqueous Cream, Zinc and Castor Oil Cream, liquid and white soft paraffin mixtures
These preparations may be carried forward and used for a maximum of 3 months. If there is still wastage after 3 months please ask GPs to change to smaller pack sizes.

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Creams containing active constituents e.g. steroid creams, Fucidin, Clotrimazole should only be used for a maximum of one month.

Method for carrying forward medication from one cycle to the next

- The name and dose of the medication must be transposed onto the new MAR chart *from the photocopy of the original prescription (not copied from the previous MAR)*
- The balance of tablets or liquid medicine to be carried over on to the new MAR must be written onto the chart to enable audit to take place.
- The entry should be signed and it is good practice to have a witness sign the entry as well.

Summary

Preparation	Unopened and stored in accordance with manufacturer's guidance	Opened and stored in accordance with manufacturer's guidance
Tablets & capsules in blister strips – where expiry date is intact	Manufacturers expiry date	Manufacturers expiry date
Tablets & capsules – where in pharmacy bottle	3 months after dispensing	3 months after dispensing
Tablets & capsules – where in Monitored Dosage System	8 weeks	8 weeks
Liquids – where in original bottle	Manufacturers expiry date	6 months
Liquids – where in amber pharmacy bottle	3 months after dispensing	3 months after dispensing
Creams	Manufacturers expiry	Open top – 1 month Tubes/pump dispenser – 3 months
Ointments	Manufacturers expiry date	Open top – 1 month Tubes/pump dispenser – 3 months
Eye drops/ointment	Manufacturers expiry date	28 days
Ear	Manufacturers expiry date	Follow guidance in Patient Information Leaflet
Nose drops/sprays	Manufacturers expiry date	Follow guidance in Patient Information Leaflet
Inhalers	Manufacturers expiry date	Manufacturers expiry date
Insulins	Manufacturers expiry date, stored in the fridge	Currently in use, can be kept out of the fridge for 1 month

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