

Urgent Bulletin: Pregabalin Prescribing

Background

Healthcare Professionals may be aware that Lyrica (pregabalin) has now lost its patents for epilepsy and generalised anxiety disorder (GAD). However the patent for neuropathic pain remains in effect. Pfizer has written to GPs, pharmacists and CCGs to remind healthcare professionals about the legal implications of prescribing and dispensing generic pregabalin for neuropathic pain. In addition the PSNC has advised community pharmacies to contact GP practices when generic prescriptions are received to ascertain the prescribing indication and to request branded prescribing where the indication is neuropathic pain¹.

A small number of generic pregabalin preparations are now available through wholesalers. Prescriptions written generically however will currently continue to be reimbursed at the cost of Lyrica, and this is the case for the March Drug Tariff. It is highly likely however that the tariff price will reduce in the next few months, thus providing an opportunity for significant prescribing savings.

Action

NHS England has issued guidance in an accompanying bulletin stating that pregabalin should only be prescribed for the treatment of neuropathic pain under the brand name Lyrica. Practices may therefore wish to undertake one of the following actions to ensure pregabalin prescribing is in line with NHS England guidance at the current time.

1. Branded Prescribing for All Indications

Identify all patients prescribed pregabalin, for any indication on their clinical system. Perform a 'mass switch' from generic pregabalin to the brand Lyrica. Patients will need to be informed of the change to their repeat prescription to avoid confusion.

Advantages: This would comply with NHS England recommendations and save GP practice time in the short term. Patients would continue to receive Lyrica and there would be no increase in prescribing costs, at least for the next month as the Drug Tariff reimbursement price in March is based on the Lyrica price.

Disadvantages: In order to ensure prescribing savings when the Tariff price falls, practices will be advised to prescribe generically for epilepsy² and GAD indications, and indeed any chronic non-cancer pain indication that is not of a neuropathic nature. This will require pregabalin prescribing to be reviewed and those patients with a diagnosis that is clearly not neuropathic pain to be switched to the generic. However this can be done over the next couple of months.

OR

2. Ensure Branded Lyrica Prescribing for Neuropathic Pain indications

Identify all patients prescribed generic pregabalin for a neuropathic pain indication. Switch these patients to branded Lyrica.

Advantages and Disadvantages: Whilst this would comply with NHS England recommendations and support the prescribing of an appropriately licensed product, this approach would require additional practice work in the short term to identify and switch specific patients to the brand Lyrica. This approach would however remove the need for a further review in the future to differentiate pregabalin prescribing based on other indications when the Drug Tariff price falls.

KCCG Prescribing Team 2nd March 2015

References

1. <http://psnc.org.uk/our-news/dispensing-of-lyrica-pregabalin/>
2. Pregabalin is a Category 3 Antiepileptic Drug, for which the MHRA states that it is usually unnecessary to ensure that patients are maintained on a specific manufacturer's product unless there are specific reasons such as patient anxiety and risk of confusion or dosing errors.
<https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/antiepileptic-drugs-new-advice-on-switching-between-different-manufacturers-products-for-a-particular-drug>