

Prescription change from generic buprenorphine to Espranor®

In July 2018 we alerted you to the supply shortage and increase in cost of generic buprenorphine. This was further communicated in a recent letter to Directors of Public Health by Public Health England (PHE) with regard to the continuation of concessionary pricing and likelihood that price rises will continue for the foreseeable future. In the medium to long term, these cost increases are unsustainable.

Change Grow Live are conscious of the requirement to consider the needs of the whole treatment population as a collective, and thus recognise that we need to be mindful of the effect that the rising cost pressure may have on our overall service delivery. As a result we have therefore explored in detail the potential impact of switching over the prescriptions of service users who are currently prescribed generic buprenorphine to Espranor.

The key considerations in relation to Espranor are summarised as follows:

1. Espranor is an innovative buprenorphine product that instantly dissolves on the tongue rather than the generic tablet that is sublingually dissolved over five minutes under the tongue.
2. The speed of dissolution compared to tablets makes it more suitable for service users, especially those supervised, **and pharmacists.**
3. Espranor contains gelatine which may make it unsuitable for service users of certain religions or vegetarians.
4. There is a potential reduced risk of diversion for Espranor in comparison to other buprenorphine products due to speed of dissolution.

We have negotiated a price for Espranor that represents a saving of approximately 50% compared to the last two months of concessionary prices, meaning we can sustainably continue to offer buprenorphine medication-assisted treatment to our service users for the foreseeable future. It is certainly possible that the elevated generic buprenorphine costs settle or reduce in the future, however we consider that having some assurance around future costs will enable us to budget appropriately and ensure continuity of treatment for our service users.

Provided it is clinically safe to do so, we intend to transfer service users from generic buprenorphine over to the branded version in due course.

The implementation plan for service users prescribed generic buprenorphine is set out below:

1. Every service user who is currently prescribed generic buprenorphine will be assessed for their suitability to move over to Espranor. Any individual with specific risks (eg mental or physical health concerns) that make medication switching undesirable will remain on generic buprenorphine.
2. Service users who are eligible will be contacted by one of CGL's doctors or prescribing clinicians to discuss the suggested medication change.
3. Details of consent to switch will be recorded on our electronic case management system.
4. Our intention to change prescriptions to Espranor as first line, will be communicated to pharmacies to ensure they have appropriate stock.

5. Service users will be provided a **Patient Information Leaflet** either from their local drug service or from the pharmacy where they collect their medication.
6. We will follow up with service users to check whether their dose is sufficient or if it needs to be titrated up or down.
7. Any service user who does not tolerate the switch to Espranor will be changed back to generic buprenorphine.

We are aware that commissioners have been equally concerned about the impact high drug prices are having on budgets. We hope that our intention to switch to Espranor therefore provides the necessary reassurances that the change will be financially sustainable and clinically safe and hope that you will be in agreement. However if you do have any concerns about this change then please feel free to contact the Regional Director for the Service.

Dr Prun Bijral
Medical Director