



integrated working



West Suffolk
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To: All community pharmacies in West Suffolk
Cc: All care home managers in West Suffolk

Dear Colleague

COVID-19: Over the Counter (OTC) Sales of Paracetamol to Care Home Staff

Current guidance recommends paracetamol as the first line antipyretic treatment for fever in people possibly infected with COVID-19. Under Care Quality Commission (CQC) Guidance, care home staff should aim to provide an effective, caring and responsive service for their residents. This includes enabling residents to 'access care, support and treatment in a timely way.' During the COVID-19 pandemic, and provided it is clinically appropriate, we are therefore recommending that care home providers try to ensure access to paracetamol for their residents, in anticipation of need, whenever possible. Treatment is likely to be required at short notice and in greater quantities than in a standard household environment.

We are asking community pharmacists to support care homes by utilising their legal entitlement to sell up to 100 paracetamol 500mg tablets in one transaction.¹ In our larger care homes, we expect to see staff requesting up to 192 tablets, purchased as two separate transactions of 96 tablets. Whilst pharmacists are empowered to refuse to sell or supply ANY medicines, if the sale or supply is contrary to the pharmacist's clinical judgement,¹ supplies of this nature are in the best interest of the patient and we strongly encourage pharmacists to use their professional discretion in authorising these sales.² There are no legal limits on the quantity of OTC paracetamol liquid that can be sold to a person at any one time.¹ Please note that swallowing difficulties are commonplace in the care home environment.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, community pharmacies should expect to receive OTC requests for paracetamol tablets and paracetamol liquid in larger quantities than usual. We appreciate the concerns around stockpiling, but this is a legitimate need, which we ask you to support.

A template document is enclosed with this letter: 'COVID-19 Pandemic: Purchase of Paracetamol Over the Counter (OTC) for the Treatment of Care Home Residents.' We will be sending this document to all care homes in West Suffolk for presentation at the pharmacy when requesting a purchase of paracetamol. If the pharmacist wishes, this document may be retained as a record of OTC supply.

Many thanks for your help with this request, which is supported by West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group, Suffolk Local Pharmaceutical Committee and the Area Prescribing Committee.

Yours sincerely

Linda Lord, Chief Pharmacist

References

¹ RPS Medicines, Ethics and Practice Edition 43

² RPS Guidance on Ethical, Professional Decision Making in the COVID-19 Pandemic: <https://www.rpharms.com/resources/pharmacy-guides/coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-information-for-pharmacists-and-teams/ethical-decision-making>