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7th October 2019

Dear Colleague

Re. Eye preparations that can be purchased over the counter (OTC) without a prescription

We are writing with reference to requests for GPs to prescribe eye treatments that can be purchased from Community Pharmacies without a prescription. We would like to explain how this is causing difficulties for both GPs and patients.

In recent years, we have noticed that increasing numbers of patients are asking their GPs to prescribe products for the treatment of dry eyes or conjunctivitis, saying that their opticians have asked them to do so.

The NHS England guidance: Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care includes recommendations on the prescribing of eye preparations that can be purchased:

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/otc-guidance-for-ccgs.pdf>

NHS England has designated mild to moderate dry eye syndrome/ dry eye disease, or sore eyes, as conditions that patients can self-care. Persons suffering mild to moderate dry eye syndrome/ dry eye disease, or sore eyes can usually be treated using lubricant eye treatments that consist of a range of drops, gels and ointments that can be easily be purchased over the counter. A prescription for treatment of dry or sore eyes should not routinely be offered in primary care. The person suffering does not normally need to seek medical advice and can manage the condition by purchasing OTC items directly.

Examples of over the counter dry eye preparations that can be purchased without the need of a prescription

| Drug name | Formulations |
|-------------------|--|
| Hypromellose | Eye drops 0.3%; Eye drops 0.3% with Dextran 70 0.1% w/v (Tears naturale®) Eye drops 0.5% (Isopto Plain ®); Eye drops 1% (Isopto Alkaline ®); Preservative free unit dose eye drops 0.3% (e.g. Lumecare®, Hydromoor®) |
| Acetylcysteine | Eye drops 5% with hypromellose 0.35% |
| Polyvinyl alcohol | Eye drops 1.4%, Liquifilm Tears® 15ml, Sno Tears® 10ml |
| Propylene glycol | Propylene glycol 0.3%, polyethylene glycol 400 0.4%, (Systane®, Systane |

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| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | Gel Drops [®] , Systane Ultra, [®]) Propylene glycol 0.6% (Systane Balance [®]) |
| Yellow Soft Paraffin | Simple Eye Ointment |
| Liquid paraffin | Eye ointment, with white soft paraffin (Lacri-Lube [®] and Xailin [®]) |
| Carbomer 980 | Eye drops 0.2% (GelTears [®] , Viscotears [®]) |
| Carmellose | Eye drops 0.5% (Optive [®]); Single use unit dose drops 0.5% , 1% |
| Hydroxymethylcellulose | Single Use Drops Minims [®] Artificial Tears 20 x 0.5ml |
| Sodium chloride | Single use Minims [®] eye drops 0.9% |
| Sodium hyaluronate | eye drops 0.1% (Hylo-Tear [®]), 0.2% (Hylo-Forte [®]) |

Treatment isn't usually needed for conjunctivitis as the symptoms usually clear within a week. There are several self-care measures that may help with symptoms. If treatment is needed, then treatment is dependent on the cause:

- In severe bacterial cases, antibiotic eye drops and eye ointments can be used to clear the infection.
- Irritant conjunctivitis will clear up as soon as whatever is causing it is removed.
- Allergic conjunctivitis can usually be treated with anti-allergy medications such as antihistamines. The substance that caused the allergy should be avoided.

Treatments for conjunctivitis including chloramphenicol can be purchased over the counter however almost half of all simple cases of conjunctivitis clear up within ten days without any treatment. Patients with 'Red flag' symptoms of conjunctivitis can be referred to a GP.

There are some circumstances where the product licence doesn't allow the product to be sold over the counter to certain groups of patients. This may vary by medicine, but could include babies, children and/or women who are pregnant or breast-feeding. Community Pharmacists will be aware of what these are and can advise accordingly.

A wide range of information is available to the public on the subjects of health promotion and the management of dry eye and conjunctivitis, including advice from the NHS website. Many community pharmacies are also open extended hours including weekends and are ideally placed to offer advice on the management of dry eyes and conjunctivitis.

We would be very grateful if you could consider the points above and support us by forwarding our messages to all practising opticians in Ealing. This will ensure they know which products GPs are able to prescribe, and patients are not disappointed when they do not receive prescriptions for them.

If you have any queries, please contact the Medicines Management Team at Ealing CCG on EALCCG.MedicinesManagementTeam@nhs.net

If you would like to meet with us to discuss this issue in more detail, please let us know when would be convenient. Thank you for your co-operation and support in this matter and we look forward to reducing the number of unwanted prescription items.

Yours sincerely

Claire Patel
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NHS Ealing Clinical Commissioning Group

Dr Shanker Vijay
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