NHS
Cheshire and Merseyside

Prescribing for patients travelling/living abroad or otherwise absent from the UK

GUIDELINE including Controlled Drugs

Recommendations

Prescribers should NOT supply treatment durations in excess of THREE MONTHS for patients who are going to travel or live abroad or are otherwise absent from the UK. Patients should use local arrangements in their country of residence for on-going medical care.

For patients (who are UK residents) going to travel outside the UK requesting medication:

- It is the patient's responsibility to check arrangements on how to obtain prescribed medicines in the country they intend to go to before leaving the UK (1). For travelling with controlled drugs see page 2.
- If a patient is going abroad, it is recommended that prescribers only prescribe at NHS expense a sufficient supply of regular medications for the patient to get to the destination and find an alternative supply of medication (1,2). The NHS should only supply a maximum of 3 months.
- The NHS's duty of care regarding prescribing ends where a patient has been absent or intends to be away from the United Kingdom for a period of more than three months (2).
- Patients who return to the UK for the purpose of obtaining medication, or who use a local proxy to request prescriptions on their behalf should be refused supply.
- Patients should be advised to check the regulations on taking medicines out of the UK and into the destination country (1) – further information is available on the NaTHNaC - Medicines and travel website.

Background

Responsibility for prescribing, including the issue of repeat prescribing and the duration of prescriptions, rests with the prescriber who has clinical responsibility for that particular aspect of a patient's care. All primary care constituent organisations recommend 28 days prescribing for most patients. For anyone requiring more than 28 days but up to 3 months' supply this is at an individual prescriber's discretion. Issuing shorter prescriptions gives the prescriber the opportunity to review on-going medication, which is important for some groups of patients especially for drugs which require monitoring. There may be safety and over ordering considerations associated with storing large quantities of a particular drug in the home.

This recommendation applies to all services contracted by or delivered by Cheshire & Mersey ICB organisations. Where treatments are commissioned by NHS England, their policies should be followed.

The clinician signing the prescription needs to be confident that satisfactory arrangements can be put in place for any drug monitoring required within the period for which they are prescribing e.g., warfarin.

Note: Patients should be directed to use local services in their country of residence with the offer of supplying appropriate medical notes and a list of current medicines to their qualified medical practitioner, or patients can access their medical records online and can share the necessary information directly themselves.

Travel vaccines that may be prescribed at NHS expense (if required) are: cholera, DTP (diphtheria/tetanus/polio), hepatitis A and typhoid (3).

Other medicines requested specifically for travelling: "Just-in case" medication e.g., anti-diarrhoeals or medicines used to delay menstruation should **not** be prescribed at NHS expense.

Controlled drug requests to travel abroad

There is a good practice requirement that the prescribed quantity of Schedule 2, 3 and 4 Controlled Drugs is limited to up to 30 days. In cases where the prescriber believes that a prescription should be issued for a longer period, they may do so but will need to be able to justify that there is a clinical need and that it would not cause an unacceptable risk to patient safety. (4)

Patients who leave or re-enter the UK for travelling abroad and carry a supply of controlled drugs (less than 3 months' supply) will be required to have either a prescription or letter from the clinician containing the following information:

- Patient's name, address and date of birth
- The outward and return dates of travel
- The country being visited
- A list of the controlled drugs being carried, including the generic name of the medicine, prescribed dosages and total quantities

Standard NHS general practice contracts do not include remuneration for providing this information in a letter. It is at the discretion of the practice whether they charge the patient for providing this letter.

During travel abroad controlled drugs should be:

- Carried in the original packaging
- Carried in hand luggage (restrictions may apply to liquid medicines)
- Carried with a letter from the prescriber
- Carried with a valid personal import/export licence (as necessary – see below)

Patients should confirm with their airline carrier the permitted quantities of medicines allowed to be carried in hand luggage, in advance of travel.

Patients who wish to travel abroad or enter the UK and have exceptional reasons why they need more than 3 month's supply of controlled drugs will require a **personal import or export licence**. (An application should be submitted at least 15 working days before the travel date). (5)

Email dflu.ie@homeoffice.gov.uk for more advice on leaving the UK with controlled drugs or if prescribed controlled drugs abroad and want to return to the UK with them.

A personal licence has no legal standing outside the UK and is intended to assist travellers passing through UK customs controls with their prescribed controlled drugs**.**

Other countries have their own import/export laws for prescription medicines and controlled drugs.

People could receive a fine or go to prison if they travel with medicine that is illegal in another country. Patients need to have checked with the embassy of the country they are going to before they travel for details. (5)

References

1. TravelHealthPro. NaTHNaC - Medicines and travel. Accessed online 24 January 2025
2. The National Health Service (General Medical Services Contracts) Regulations 2004. NHS England Statutory Instrument No.291. Accessed online 24 January 2025

3. NHS England. NHS England » Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: policy guidance. Accessed online 24 January 2025
4. PSNC. Controlled Drug prescription forms and validity - PSNC Website. Accessed online 24 January 2025
5. GOV.UK. Controlled drugs: personal licences - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). Accessed online 24 January 2025