

Empowering patients to manage their repeat prescriptions

This bulletin aims to provide an overview of the patient resources available to help empower patients to manage ordering their own repeat prescription.

Recommendations

- Use interactions with patients as an opportunity to highlight the benefits of managing their own repeat prescription ordering, with an emphasis on online ordering using the GP practice online ordering process, NHS app (England, Isle of Man), My Health Online (Wales) or other effective app or website for those who have internet access.
- Use patient resources, e.g. patient guides or leaflets to support people setting up online accounts and ordering repeat prescriptions.
- Ensure all GP practice staff in England and the Isle of Man are aware of the benefits of the NHS app and encourage patients to sign up for an NHS account if they are able to.
- Use a range of different patient resources to emphasise the benefits of online ordering of repeat prescriptions.
- Encourage patients to only order what they need each time, to avoid wastage and stockpiling, whilst providing reassurance that it is not necessary to order medication every month for it to stay on a repeat prescription.
- Patients who are not taking their medicine(s), or not taking them as prescribed, should be encouraged to discuss the reasons why with a qualified healthcare professional (e.g. doctor, nurse, community pharmacist or GP practice pharmacist) to try to come up with a suitable solution.
- Patients who don't understand what a particular medicine is for or how to take it, should be encouraged to discuss this with their local community or GP practice pharmacist.

Background

Repeat prescribing can reduce the need for appointments and ensure continuity of medicines.¹ However, ordering repeat prescriptions must be managed properly, otherwise, they can take up a significant amount of time for patients, primary care prescribers and practice staff and result in patients not ordering on time or giving up trying to order their treatment, or overordering, stockpiling and wastage.¹

GP practices can receive over 200 requests for repeat items a day, and GPs can spend up to two hours a day dealing with repeat prescriptions.¹ Streamlining this process has the potential to save time spent processing repeat prescriptions for both patients, their carers, prescribers and practice staff. Empowering patients to manage this process themselves, if they are able, can help to ensure that only those medicines needed are ordered each time.

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In addition to saving time and simplifying what can otherwise be a complex or laborious process, there are also other potential benefits in terms of ensuring that patients are aware of the importance of attending for planned reviews, highlighting any non-adherence or problems experienced with prescribed items, and reducing waste and the stockpiling of medicines.

Online ordering services

Encouraging patients to use an online repeat prescription ordering service can provide a more convenient, seamless and safer service, in addition to increasing patient empowerment.²

Some requests for medication over the telephone are not clear and can take considerable time and effort to clarify what is needed, whereas online requests avoid potential confusion, transcription and medication issue errors.²

Moreover, practices with more patients registered for online services receive fewer telephone calls² and face-to-face interactions with patients, which releases time for reception and administration staff to carry out other essential tasks.³ This also provides a better experience for patients contacting or attending the practice for other reasons.^{2,3}

In England and the Isle of Man, for patients with an NHS account, repeat prescriptions can be ordered by logging into their account using the NHS app or NHS website.^{4,5} Having an NHS account and using the NHS app also has the advantage of making it easy for users to receive notifications from their GPs and view and manage their hospital appointments, all in the same place.⁶ The government aims to have 75% of people registered on the NHS app in England by 2024.⁶ Those without an NHS account are able to create one at any time if they are aged 13 years or over and are registered with an NHS GP surgery in England or the Isle of Man.⁷

Alternatively, there are also pharmacy or GP practice online services and apps that can be used to order a repeat prescription.⁴ Please note: the below lists are not exhaustive.

Pharmacy online services include: ⁴	GP online services include*: ⁴
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boots• Hey Pharmacist• Lloyds Pharmacy• Pharmacy2U	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Airmid• Evergreen Life PHR• myCohens• myGP• Patally• Patient Access• SystemOnline

*eConsult is not recommended for ordering and managing repeat prescriptions as it is not intended for this purpose.⁸

Where online repeat prescription ordering is not appropriate for an individual patient or their carer, prescriptions can be ordered using the repeat prescription ordering slip attached to the prescription or via an alternative suitable method.

As a healthcare professional, what can I do to help?

- Use interactions with patients as an opportunity to highlight the benefits of managing their own repeat prescription ordering, where applicable, including only ordering what is needed each time and the benefits of participating in a regular structured medication review.
- Ensure reception staff are advised to highlight the most effective online resources to patients for ordering their repeat prescription, and ask patients for their email addresses to add to their electronic medical record if they use the internet.³

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- Display posters/leaflets/information messages to emphasise these benefits, such as on a wall display, the GP practice website and social media accounts.³
- Consider introducing a “floor walker” during morning and afternoon surgery, encouraging patients who are waiting for their appointment to register.³
- Include registering for online repeat prescription ordering as standard in new patient registration packs.³
- In England and the Isle of Man, ensure all GP practice staff are aware of the benefits of the NHS app and encourage patients to sign up for an NHS account if they are able to.
- Use targeted campaigns including identifying target groups of patients such as those who email regularly for repeat prescriptions or collect paper prescriptions.³
- Create an efficient way to contact target groups, e.g. verified email address, SMS; “flyer” on the back of a paper prescription, face to face whilst attending surgery etc.³
- Change the practice telephone answer message to include “You can order your repeat prescription online via...”.³
- The above methods can be used to ensure that patients are aware of the options to order their repeat prescription online via their NHS account/app or other effective apps and online services. Inform patients to review the individual items they require each time, in order to avoid waste.
- Patients who are not taking their medicine(s), or not taking them as prescribed, should be encouraged to discuss the reasons with a qualified healthcare professional (e.g. doctor, nurse, community pharmacist or GP practice pharmacist) to try to come up with a suitable solution, such as alleviating concerns, explaining the benefits, suggesting a suitable alternative or stopping the medicine, as appropriate.
- Patients who don't understand what a particular medicine is for or how to take it, should be encouraged to discuss this with their local community or GP practice pharmacist.

Patient resources

NHS England have produced a range of free materials to use to help promote GP online services to patients. These are available via <https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp-online-services/support/supporting-material/>

These materials include:

- Support and resource guides – including template articles for the website or blog, social media posts for websites such as Facebook and Twitter, and a press release for use with your local media.
- Patient guides – information that you can give to patients that tells them more about GP online services.
- Practice guides – information for GP practices.
- Promotional materials – leaflets, posters, balloons and bunting to help you promote GP online services to patients in your practice.
- Digital downloads – material you can download and use on the website, social media or waiting room screens.

In England, information on how to order a repeat prescriptions is available on the NHS website at <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/online-services/how-to-order-a-repeat-prescription/>. Information regarding the NHS app and an NHS account (including links to download the NHS app) can be found at <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-app/>.

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In Wales, information for patients on [My Health Online](#) is available from NHS Digital Health and Care Wales.

In Scotland, NHS Inform provide information for patients about ordering repeat prescriptions on their website at <https://www.nhsinform.scot/tests-and-treatments/medicines-and-medical-aids/prescriptions#getting-your-prescription>.

In Northern Ireland, patients can find out if their GP practice offers online services, including ordering repeat prescriptions, and how to set up an online account from the nidirect website at: <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/gp-online-services>.

In addition, patient information, text messages and a poster are available as attachments with this resource which can be adapted for local use.

Summary

Repeat prescribing can reduce the need for appointments and ensure continuity of medicines.¹ However, ordering repeat prescriptions must be managed properly, otherwise, they can take up a significant amount of time for patients, primary care prescribers and practice staff and result in overordering, stockpiling and wastage.¹ In addition, poor management of repeat prescriptions can result in an overly complex process for patients (extra telephone calls and practice visits) and put patients at risk of potential confusion, transcription and medication issue errors.²

Increasing the uptake of the effective online ordering of repeat prescriptions for those who have internet access or access to mobile apps and encouraging patients to manage their own repeat prescriptions, where possible, and only order what they need each time can overcome these issues and improve the process for all concerned.

References

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Additional PrescQIPP resources

Briefing	https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-325-empowering-patients-to-manage-their-repeat-prescriptions
Implementation tools	

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