

Prescribing guidance for NHS patients who travel abroad

1. Scope

This document advises health care professionals in Surrey Downs CCG on the circumstances when an NHS prescription may be offered to an NHS patient travelling abroad registered with a Surrey Downs GP practice.

2. Patients travelling for three months or less

Under legislation, the NHS ceases to have responsibility for people when they leave the UK.

People travelling within Europe should be advised to carry the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) at all times; this gives entitlement to local health care arrangements. Patients are advised to check specific entitlements and appropriate health advice prior to travel and obtain adequate holiday insurance cover. See link on [NHS Choices website](#).

2.1 Pre-existing condition

Medication required for a pre-existing condition should be provided in sufficient quantity to cover the journey and to allow the patient to obtain medical attention abroad. If the patient is returning within the timescale of a normal prescription (usually one and no more than three months) then this should be issued, providing it is clinically appropriate.

2.2 Just-in case treatments

An NHS prescription should not be provided for medication which is requested solely in anticipation of the onset of an ailment whilst outside the UK, but for which treatment is not required at the time of prescribing (e.g. travel sickness, altitude sickness).

Patients should be advised to purchase these items locally prior to travel; advice is available from community pharmacists if required. A private prescription may be provided for any prescription-only medicines.

2.3 Taking controlled drugs abroad

Department of Health guidance recommends that, in general, prescriptions for controlled drugs should be limited to a supply of up to 30 days treatment.

Exceptionally (to cover a justifiable clinical need and after consideration of any risk) a prescription can be issued for a longer period, but the reasons for the decision should be recorded in the patient's notes.

Patients who are carrying certain controlled drugs abroad (or in the case of an import licence, into the UK) *for less than three months* for their own personal use do not need a personal export or import licence. They should carry a letter from the prescribing doctor with the following details:

- patient's name, address and date of birth
- the full travel itinerary including outward and return dates of travel
- a list of the drugs the patient will be carrying, including dosages and total amounts

Controlled drugs should be:

- carried in original packaging
- carried in hand luggage (airline regulations permitting)
- carried with a valid personal import/export licence (if necessary; see below)

Persons travelling abroad (or visitors travelling to the UK) in *excess of three months* and carrying controlled drugs will require a personal export or import licence. 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.

It is always advisable to contact the embassy, consulate or high commission of the country to be visited regarding their policy on the import of controlled drugs, as the legal status of UK prescription only (POM) controlled drugs varies between countries.

3. Patients travelling abroad for more than three months

NHS England has a duty to remove any patient from the list of a practice if they are informed that the patient has "*been absent from the United Kingdom for a period of more than three months*". The test for the practice informing NHS England ought to be this person has retained a sufficient connection to the UK to continue to be habitually resident here and thus can justify remaining on the practice list.

The BMA GPC advice on prescribing in General Practice advises that "the NHS accepts responsibility for supplying on-going medication for temporary periods abroad of up to three months. If a person is going to be abroad for more than three months then all that the patient is entitled to at NHS expense is a sufficient supply of his/her regular medication to get to the destination and find an alternative supply of that medication."

It is for the GP to consider this guidance and may wish to decide in which circumstances they will give up to three month's supply of medicines.

It is wise for the patient to check with the manufacturer that medicines required are available in the country being visited. It is also worth advising that some UK prescription only medicines can be purchased without a prescription from pharmacies in some countries.

4. Private prescriptions for patients travelling abroad for more than three months

A private prescription could be offered for patients travelling abroad for more than three months. The BMA GPC guidance advises that any doctor can write a private prescription for a patient if they feel it is clinically appropriate and they are happy to take responsibility for that prescribing decision. Under the NHS regulations, a GP or his deputy can write a private prescription for a patient but cannot charge the patient for writing a private prescription if the patient is registered for NHS care with that GP or any other GP in the same practice.

Agreed by Surrey Downs GP Prescribing Leads Group: December 2015

Review date: December 2017

References:

Greater Manchester Medicines Management Group Guidance,
BMA General Practitioners Committee " Prescribing in General Practice" May 2013.