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19th March 2020

Circular 010/20

Re: COVID-19 Pharmacy FAQs

Dear Pharmacist,

The HSE recognises the importance of community pharmacy and acknowledges the various daily challenges faced as the situation in relation to COVID-19 evolves. To assist and support community pharmacy contractors during this period, FAQs have been developed (enclosed).

The HSE website (www.hse.ie/coronavirus) will be updated on a regular basis for the most up to date COVID-19 information. Pharmacists should also keep up to date with information provided by the Pharmaceutical Society of Ireland (www.thepsi.ie) and the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (www.hpsc.ie).

Thank-you for your continued support during this challenging period.

Yours faithfully,

Shaun Flanagan
Primary Care Reimbursement and Eligibility

Community Pharmacy Contractors Frequently Asked Questions COVID-19 (Coronavirus)

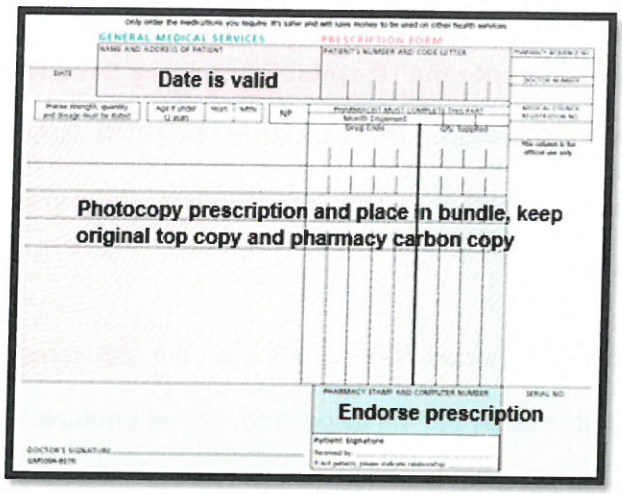
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1. **My GMS patients are having difficulty obtaining their routine appointments with the GP and do not have any further GMS prescriptions for their ongoing repeat medications. As only 5 days emergency supply can be provided, how can my GMS patients access their monthly medications in time?**

It is acknowledged that GMS patients may have difficulties in obtaining their monthly GMS prescriptions. Therefore, pharmacists are asked to retain the last GMS prescription and use this prescription for supplies for the next couple of months, once the prescription date is legally valid (i.e. dated within the last 6 months).

The prescription must be endorsed in the normal manner and a photocopy of the prescription inserted into the claims bundle for that month. The original prescription can then be kept by the pharmacist for the following months' supply. See next page.



2. How will I manage my end of month claims to PCRS?

Given the challenging period and the exceptional circumstances that are faced by pharmacists at present, the HSE has taken the decision to streamline (where possible) and to minimise the administrative requirements under the GMS and other statutory schemes for pharmacies. Therefore, pharmacies can retain the usual supporting documentation at the end of the month until further notice.

Claims can be submitted electronically in the normal manner for reimbursement. In the first instance validation will be applied verifying patient history. For exceptional items pharmacies may be required to scan and submit supporting documentation to PCRS.PPUInvoices@HSE.ie with GMS pharmacy number and contact details clearly identified.

Unless contractors are in a position to switch on electronic claiming in a short timeframe, Manual claimers will unfortunately have to submit their paper bundles in the normal manner for their claims to be processed.

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3. A GMS patient has been discharged from the hospital with a prescription that can be dispensed under the Hospital Emergency Scheme. However, they are unable to get a GMS prescription transcribed by their GP within the 7 day timeframe. Can I dispense the month's supply from the hospital prescription in these circumstances?

Yes – during this critical period the HSE will relax the requirement that a maximum of 7 days' supply without undue delay can be dispensed. For all products other than Controlled Drugs, this can be extended to one month supply (where specified on the Hospital prescription) under the Hospital Emergency Scheme on foot of the valid hospital prescription. Any Hospital Emergency prescription or Hospice prescription will be encompassed by this facility until further notice.

4. My patient's High Tech Prescription has expired and their outpatient appointment has been cancelled as a result of the Coronavirus outbreak. Will the HSE High Tech Ordering and Management Hub accept a GP prescription in the interim?

In the case where a patient's High Tech Prescription Form is no longer valid and their Consultant appointment is cancelled, a GP prescription for maintenance products will be acceptable in this exceptional circumstance. In some cases, it may be possible that a High Tech Prescription Form can be issued from the hospital clinic to the patient via post or to the nominated pharmacy initially through secure email with the original issued directly to the pharmacy thereafter.

Where the hospital clinic generate High Tech Hub prescriptions (prescription serial numbers leading with HTH), please check your patient history as the hospital clinic may have already generated a new high tech prescription. You can do this by searching for your patient on the 'My Patients' tab and you will see all prescriptions with the most recent prescription at the top of the screen.

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If so, you can proceed to order from the new prescription on the high tech hub and the hospital will post the new high tech prescription.

If not, and the patient previously had a High Tech Hub prescription, the hospital clinic should be able to generate a repeat prescription. Once you see the prescription on 'My Patients' tab you can place your order before you receive the paper prescription to support dispensing.

Where none of the above can be arranged for an individual patient, and it is critical to maintain continuity of supply for the specific patient, the High Tech Hub will authorise supply even though the HT prescription is no longer in date. Please place the order using the most recent prescription, albeit out of date, and input explanatory note of why you are using an out of date prescription.

Pharmacy contractors must make the HSE aware of temporary closures as they arise. Where a pharmacy has agreed transfer of High Tech patients from another pharmacy that has closed temporarily, the pharmacy should complete change of nominated pharmacy process before placing orders. If any issue arises with transfer of patients please contact the High Tech Hub at PCRS.HiTech@hse.ie or 01 8647135.

5. My GMS patient had prior approval for a product under Discretionary Hardship Arrangements which is now due for renewal. Do I need to apply to the local health office for further ongoing approval?

No – the HSE will extend reimbursement approvals that were due for renewal for 3 months. A further application does not need to be made until after this period.

6. Do I continue to apply under Discretionary Hardship Arrangements in the normal manner through the Local Health Office?

It is anticipated that a number of HSE staff will be redeployed at various time points to assist with COVID-19 work. Therefore, until further notice, applications for approval under Discretionary Hardship Arrangements for newly prescribed items (See above re approvals already in situ) will be centralised to the PCERS. Applications must be submitted via secure email – i.e healthmail to novelhardship@hse.ie.

As it may be increasingly difficult to get prescribers to complete and sign HD1 forms, the following will be required for reimbursement support consideration of exceptional items;

- A copy of the prescription
- The supplier and cost quote of the product (for example; a proforma invoice)
- Pharmacy GMS contract number and contact telephone details
- Any item that is required urgently for a patient under these arrangements (i.e. palliative care, end of life treatment) must be marked as **'Urgent'** in the email subject title to enable prioritisation

The pharmacy will receive a response via email, therefore it is important that a secure pharmacy email address (healthmail) has been used for this purpose.

Manual claims for processing payments will still need to be forwarded to the Local Health Office.

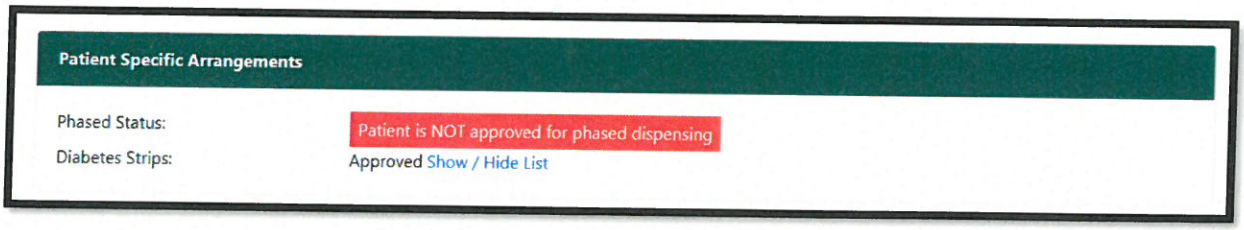
7. My patients are requesting more than one month supply under Community Drug Schemes, can I provide more than one month's supply to them?

No – as per Circular 08/20, it is vital to continuity of supply of essential medicines that stockpiling at pharmacy or patient level does not occur and that one month's supply is the maximum quantity allowed under the GMS and Community Drug Schemes.

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8. Who do I contact for queries in relation to reimbursement approvals?

Patient specific approvals can be found on the Secure Scheme Checker under 'Patient Specific Arrangements'.



Current approvals in place for Phased Dispensing, ONS and PrEP will be maintained and not expire until further notice.

As always, pharmacies can contact PCRS at 01- 8647100 for queries in relation to reimbursement. Pharmacies can contact Pharmacy Function directly (option 7) but it is preferable to email pharmacy.response@hse.ie as we will also be dealing with redeployment urgencies from time to time in the coming weeks.

9. My patients who have phased dispensing approval are asking for their full month's supply. Can I provide them with the full month's supply?

It is important to keep the patient's safety in mind when you receive such a request. Where you are satisfied that it is safe to do so, you can dispense the full month's supply to either the patient or a family member but you must adjust your claiming procedure to reflect a single supply occasion.

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10. The HSE requires third party verification on receiving dispensed items under GMS and Community Drug Schemes. Given the current pandemic situation, is a signature required during this time?

To assist pharmacies in managing unprecedented demands and to reduce the time taken in contact engagements, the HSE will be temporarily setting aside the requirement for signatures until further notice.

11. What should I do if there are reduced levels of staffing or no pharmacist to allow for the operation of the pharmacy?

You have already received advice from the HSE in relation to contingency planning and ensuring that there is a clear and accessible plan in place, individual to your pharmacy, in the eventuality of your pharmacy being forced to close temporarily.

The contingency plan should provide a pathway for your most vulnerable patients (including, but not limited to, patients receiving medicines under the High Tech Arrangements, palliative care, opioid substitution treatment, those on 'specials' products) and specify clearly the pharmacy where you propose to transfer these patient's prescriptions, and where necessary, their medicines.

Pharmacy contractors should notify their local HSE Pharmacist (via email, details attached) of the closure and should provide the name and GMS number of the nearest pharmacy which has agreed to liaise with you and provide cover to your patients in the eventuality of your pharmacy being forced to close. The PSI must be alerted to the closure of the pharmacy via rpbreg@psi.ie.

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