

Fact Sheet: Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community (England)

This fact sheet is based on findings from *Prescriptions Dispensed in the Community; England, Statistics for 2000 to 2010*; released by The NHS IC on 27 July 2011. The bulletin looks at prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacists, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors in England. It highlights recent changes and the main trends between 2000 and 2010.

Overall findings for 2010:

- Nearly 927 million prescription items were dispensed; a 4.6 per cent rise on 2009 and a 68 per cent rise on 2000. Total net ingredient cost was £8,834million; a 3.5 per cent rise on 2009 and a 58.2 per cent rise on 2000.
- An average of 17.8 prescription items were dispensed per head of the population; compared to 17.1 in 2009 and 11.2 in 2000. Net ingredient cost per patient in 2010 was £169, compared to £165 in 2009 and £113 in 2000.
- The average net ingredient cost per prescription item was £9.53; compared to £9.64 in 2009 and £10.12 in 2000.
- 67.4 per cent of all prescription items were dispensed as generic formulations, representing 29.6 per cent of the total cost. In 2009 these figures were 66.1 per cent and 28.3 per cent respectively and in 2000 they were 51.8 per cent and 21.6 per cent respectively.

Findings by British National Formulary (BNF) chapter and section

- The leading BNF Chapter in terms of prescription items dispensed is the *Cardiovascular System* and in terms of net ingredient cost is the *Central Nervous System*. The leading BNF Section in terms of prescription items dispensed is *Hypertension and Heart Failure* and in terms of net ingredient cost is *Drugs used in Diabetes*. All leading chapters and sections are the same as in 2009.

• **Respiratory disease**

In the top 10 drugs by cost, four are for the treatment of respiratory disease. These are inhaled medicines (*fluticasone*, *beclometasone*, *budesonide* and *tiotropium*) used in the treatment of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and asthma. Respiratory disease has the second highest cost per prescription item (£17.16) after malignant disease and immunosuppression. More was spent on inhaled fluticasone formulations than any other medicine during the year (£380.6 million).

- BNF Section 6.1, Drugs used in diabetes**, had the greatest overall cost in 2010 (£713.2 million) and had the greatest increase in cost (£78.4m) over the last year. This was the major contributor to the overall cost increase, accounting for over a quarter on the additional cost in 2010 over 2009.

- **BNF Section 4.7 Analgesics** had the second largest increase in cost (8.2 per cent, £37.0 million). Use of these medicines increased (by 4.6 per cent) to 60.1 million items. There was increased use of *paracetamol*, *co-codamol* and *sumatriptan succinate*. Under the category M scheme costs rose for *paracetamol* and *co-codamol* by £15.3 million and fell by £6.3 million for *sumatriptan succinate*.
 - There was increased use of:
 - *oxycodone hydrochloride*, mainly the modified-release products, with costs increasing by £7.9 million between 2009 and 2010 to reach 44.2 million.
 - *buprenorphine*, mainly low dose transdermal patches (5, 10 and 20mcg/hr), with costs increasing by £5.9 million between 2009 and 2010 to reach 36.7 million.
- **BNF Section 4.8 Antiepileptics** had the third largest increase in cost (£36.1 million) with the number of items dispensed increasing by 10.2 per cent. The following chemicals have seen costs rise in line with increased use: - *pregabalin*, *levetiracetam*, *midazolam* and *lacosamide*. Use of *topiramate* and *gabapentin* rose but costs fell by under the category M scheme.
- **Special Order Products** In 2008, NHS Prescription Services began coding the liquid special formulations and, in 2009, coding other types of special formulations such as ointments, capsules and tablets, to identify them as a group within their information systems. This grouping has been applied to the PCA dataset for the first time. Analysis shows that the number of special order products dispensed in 2010 was 0.7 million items at a cost of £138.7 million. The average cost per item was £194, in comparison with the overall average cost per item of £9.53. The leading chemicals dispensed as specials were melatonin and midazolam.
- **The Category M scheme** is an arrangement where the net ingredient cost for selected generic formulations is controlled, with the aim of reducing costs overall. Drugs subject to these arrangements are classified as Category M in Part VIII of the Drug Tariff. The majority of these formulations have fallen in price, although some formulations have increased in price. These price adjustments have contributed to shifts in the relative positions of drug chapters and sections in the tables of this bulletin and affect overall cost per item. Areas where the scheme has had a notable affect on prescribing costs have been highlighted within the report.