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BOOST FOR PARENTS OF PREMATURE BABIES IN SCOTLAND AFTER SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN BY HEALTH EXPERTS (revised)

Thousands of parents of premature babies in Scotland will be able to receive an important nutritional benefit to help their baby's growth and development when a special formula becomes available on prescription from the end of October.

The move was prompted by pressure from consultants working in Paediatric and Neo-Natal departments, who were concerned that parents of premature babies who did not breastfeed needed the product to be widely available to ensure the infants received the extra nutrition required.

Nutriprem 2 – a specially designed formula for preterm babies – is produced by Cow & Gate. It will be prescribable on the NHS in Scotland from 31 October, following a consultation about the status of various nutritional products by the Department of Health and the Scottish Executive. The Government was contacted by dozens of consultants, urging it to make Nutriprem 2 available on prescription.

It is estimated that over 37,000 babies are born prematurely each year and 70,000 need some form of special care at birth¹. Many require special supplements to provide the extra protein and nutrients that are needed by preterm infants to help catch up growth.

Until now, babies in Special Care Baby Units and Neo-Natal care have received this nutrition, but their parents had to purchase the formula at their own expense when the baby was discharged. Low birthweight babies often need special nutritional feeds for up to nine months after birth and it is believed that many parents on low income were unable to afford the special formula for their babies. The changes will mean that the costs to parents of providing Nutriprem 2 for their baby will be significantly reduced.

The Scottish Executive has passed regulations to amend the drug tariff in Scotland and the changes will come into force on 31 October. This follows changes in England and Wales from 1 August, and Northern Ireland from 1 October.

Notes For Editors

1 NHS Maternity Statistics, England, Department of Health, June 2001

- Breastfeeding is best for babies. Cow & Gate Nutriprem 2 is a nutritionally complete catch-up formula for low birthweight and preterm babies that are not breastfed. It is recommended that Cow & Gate Nutriprem 2 be used only on the advice of a doctor, midwife, health visitor, public health nurse, dietician or pharmacist.
- Low birthweight: Infants less than 2.5kg

Preterm: Infants born before 37 weeks gestation.

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