

Prescribing for clinical need – Soluble tablets survey report

While soluble and effervescent preparations of analgesics may appear convenient, it is important to be aware of their high sodium content. Eight soluble paracetamol tablets per day exceed the maximum recommended sodium intake for an adult of 6gm salt; this equates to 2.4gm of sodium. An observational study has shown an association between sodium-containing formulations of effervescent, dispersible and soluble medicines and adverse cardiovascular events.

These products are also considerably more expensive than standard tablets or capsules. Soluble preparations are more expensive than plain tablets:

- Soluble paracetamol tablets are approximately three times the cost of plain tablets: paracetamol soluble tablets 500mg are £9.21 vs. £2.19 per 100 tablets, respectively.
- Soluble co-codamol 30/500 is approximately twice the price: £8.66 vs. £3.97 per 100 tablets, respectively.

On this basis, assuming a saving of 50% on the 2015-16 baseline spend of £195k, this could potentially offer prescribing savings of £97k.

Therefore, they should only be prescribed with caution and only if there are compelling reasons to do so, for example patients with genuine swallowing difficulties.

In line with item 14U of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 a survey was conducted to gather the views of the public in regards to the proposal to stop the regular prescribing of soluble medications.

The health and social care act states:

Each clinical commissioning group must, in the exercise of its functions, promote the involvement of patients, and their carers and representatives (if any), in decisions which relate to:

- the prevention or diagnosis of illness in the patients, or
- their care or treatment.

The survey was conducted online on the CCG web site and was promoted via social media and through third party organisations as well as via GP practices and Care Homes.

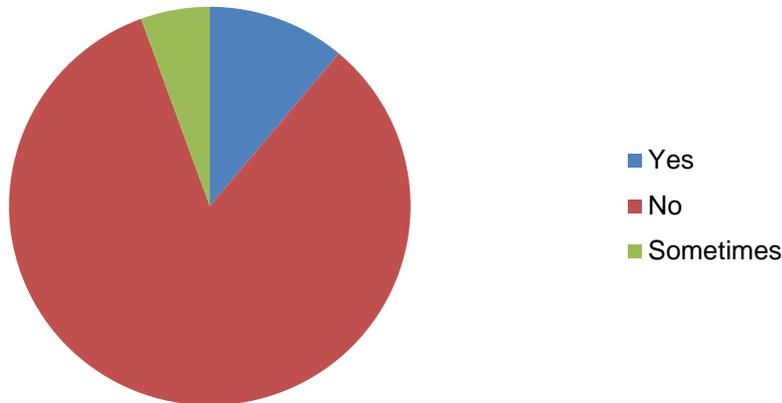
Responses

There were 18 responses to the survey, 100 per cent of respondents were from Blackpool.

The survey asked a number of questions. The below are the responses to each.



Do you ask for soluble medications on prescription?



Why do you use soluble medications?

Those who took soluble medications all the time or sometimes answered this question. Two of them said they need them as they have difficulty swallowing (These people will not be affected by the proposal as there is a clear clinical need for them to have this type of medication). One respondent said they felt the soluble medication worked quicker.

Under proposals if you have a clinical need for soluble medications (for example if your GP deems that you have a condition which affects your throat, making swallowing difficult) you will still be offered them. If you do not you will be advised to take regular tablets or purchase your own soluble variety. Do you agree with these proposals?

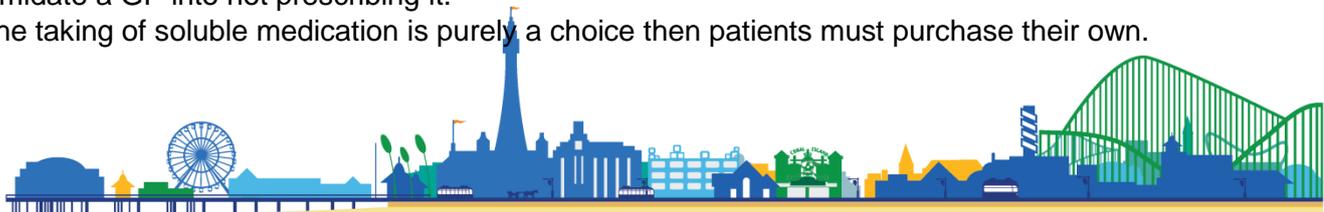
This is essentially the most important question in the survey.

100 per cent of respondents said they agreed.

Would you like to add any other comments?

The following additional comments were received:

- Medication which is cheaper to buy over the counter should be removed from the prescription service such as pain killers like paracetamol and aspirin.
- I think the benefits of taking medication in tablet form far outweigh the alleged ease of soluble meds. In my experience you are more likely to leave some of the solution rather than drink it all. And given the salt content (and sometimes the addition of sweeteners including aspartame) I'd rather give them a miss.
- As I require to take a lot of medicine each day I am thankful for coated tablets. Thank you for this.
- I am perfectly happy to go along with the recommendation as long as the final say is left with the GP. If there is a clinical need for a patient to have soluble medication then there should never be a barrier to a GP prescribing it. By a barrier I mean the CCG should not try to intimidate a GP into not prescribing it.
- If the taking of soluble medication is purely a choice then patients must purchase their own.



Conclusion

The number of responses was disappointing however it is not uncommon for surveys of this nature; on a subject that affects a very specific group of people, to have low response rates.

Previous surveys on prescribing for clinical need have been very favourable towards removing medication from the regularly prescribed list

It is reasonable to say that the findings of this, and other surveys, indicate a majority in favour of the recommendation to only prescribe soluble medication when there is a clinical need for it.

