Prescribing & Medicines: Dispenser Payments and Prescription Cost Analysis

An Official Statistics publication for Scotland

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About this release

This release by Information Services Division reports on the number and cost of NHS prescriptions dispensed in the community in Scotland for the financial year 2018/19. It includes a breakdown of dispensing contractor payments, which are for services provided (remuneration) and products dispensed (reimbursement). The report also includes additional information on specific Community Pharmacy services to the public.

Main Points

Overall Cost

- The total (net) cost for dispensing items and providing services in 2018/19 was £1.34 billion, representing a decrease of 0.5% compared to 2017/18. This follows a period of largely rising cost, increasing by 20.0% over the last 10 years.

Products Reimbursed

- There was little change in the total number of items reimbursed between 2017/18 and 2018/19. Over the last 10 years the total number of items reimbursed has increased by 15.8% from 89.3 million to 103.4 million items.

- The cost of items reimbursed (Net Ingredient Cost) has increased by 19.2% over the last 10 years, however between 2017/18 and 2018/19 it decreased by 1.3%.

- The cost of medicines (Gross Ingredient Cost) for items reimbursed decreased by 2.0% between 2017/18 and 2018/19, to £1.14 billion.

- Glecaprevir and pibrentasivir, used to treat chronic hepatitis C infection, had the highest total Gross Ingredient Cost in 2018/19, at £41.1 million.

Services Provided

- The cost for remuneration of services has increased by 5.5% between 2017/18 and 2018/19 to £227.8 million.
Background

Information on NHS services provided in community pharmacies, NHS prescriptions dispensed in Scotland and drugs prescribed in Scotland and dispensed elsewhere in the United Kingdom is obtained from the Prescribing Information System. GPs write the vast majority of these prescriptions, with the remainder written by authorised prescribers such as nurses, dentists and allied health professionals (AHPs). The data also include prescriptions written in hospitals that were dispensed in the community, but prescriptions dispensed within hospitals are not included. All these prescriptions are dispensed by dispensing contractors, who include community pharmacies, dispensing doctors, a small number of specialist appliance suppliers and stoma providers. Dispensing contractors receive two distinct types of payment: remuneration for the service they provide and reimbursement for the products they dispense. Payments are derived from information gathered by Practitioner Services after the pricing of prescriptions has taken place and then payment is made on behalf of NHS Boards. The main statistics reported on in this publication are volume, which is the count of all the prescription items reimbursed; the costs of remuneration of services and the cost of items reimbursed.

Please note: There has been a change to the measures used in this report to provide a more accurate reflection of the costs to NHS Scotland. In previous years the Dispenser Payments and Prescription Cost Analysis publication reported the key measures as dispensed Items and dispensed Gross Ingredient Cost. Gross Ingredient Cost has been reported as excluding broken bulk. For this publication of 23 July 2019 the key measures have been changed to paid items and paid Gross Ingredient Cost including broken bulk. The cumulative effect on 2018/19 data is small - a reduction of 0.02% of items and 0.3% of overall costs. A full explanation of these terms and the reasons for these changes can be found in the full report.

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Further Information

Find out more in the full report. The data from this publication is available to download from our web page.

For more information on Remuneration and Prescription Cost Analysis see the Remuneration section of our website. For related topics, please see the Prescribing and Medicines pages.

The next release of this publication will be 22 July 2020.

ISD and Official Statistics

Information Services Division (ISD) is the principal and authoritative source of statistics on health and care services in Scotland. ISD is designated by legislation as a producer of 'Official Statistics'. Our official statistics publications are produced to a high professional standard and comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. Further information about our statistics.