

November 2025

Guidance note: Learning from a Prevention of Future Death (PFD) Report on Time Critical Medicines

Time critical (time sensitive) medicines must be given at specific times of the day to ensure they are fully effective. They should be prescribed, made available, prepared and administered on time every time. A recent Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report highlighted the death of a patient with epilepsy who missed doses of their antiepileptic medication for 48 hours because they were unable to obtain a supply of their antiepileptic medication, Fycompa® (Perampanel) despite following NHS advice. This guidance note has been developed to share learning from severe medicines-related harm. It applies to clinical and non-clinical staff involved in medicines in primary care (general practice, primary care networks and community pharmacy teams). Please note this medicines-related patient safety event occurred outside of North East London (NEL) and learning points have been shared to help prevent similar harms.

Actions for General Practice

- When prescribing time critical (time sensitive) medicines, remind patients and their carer(s) to take their medicines on time and inform them about the risk of missed doses, including the risk of life-threatening situations when medication is not taken for “cliff-edge conditions”. A non-exhaustive list of “cliff edge conditions” includes epilepsy, diabetes, long term mental health conditions treated with antipsychotics, coagulation disorders, asthma, Addison’s disease, Parkinson’s disease and organ transplant recipients receiving immunosuppressant therapy.
- Advise patients and their carer(s) to keep track of medication supply and request repeat prescriptions before they run out (e.g. when they have two weeks’ supply remaining) and ensure there is help available for patients that require additional support in ordering their medicines.
- Clinicians must safety-net patients prescribed time critical medicines and advise them about what to do if they run out of medication (e.g. approach a designated pharmacy for an emergency supply, contact NHS 111 or go to A&E).
- During annual medication review for patients prescribed medicines where timing is critical or patients with “cliff-edge conditions”, add flags in clinical systems which refer to where a patient’s life is at serious risk if they don’t receive their medication or treatment in time.
- Ensure patients have the knowledge on how to access their time critical (time sensitive) medicines as part of discussions held in their medication review.
- Consider using the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) and the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) repeat prescribing toolkit to assess and improve safety and effectiveness of prescribing systems
- Consider reviewing existing repeat prescribing processes in the practice in conjunction with PrescQIPP repeat prescribing resources.
- Ensure all staff are trained to recognise and escalate requests from patients for time critical medicines as urgent.

Actions for Community Pharmacy

- When dispensing medicines, please signpost patients to the [Patient Information Leaflet \(PIL\)](#) (which is supplied with the medication). The [NHS website](#) and NHS App also provides additional patient information on medicines.
- When [repeat dispensing medicines](#) are ordered or supplied, confirm that there is no clinical or other reason for the patient to be referred to their GP. If any concern arises, signpost accordingly.
- When [counselling](#) patients and their carer(s) on how to use their medication, remind patients when they will need to re-order supplies.
- When [counselling](#) patients and their carer(s) please reiterate the importance of avoiding missed doses for medicines dispensed to treat conditions that require time critical medicines.
- When a person requires help to obtain medicines that the pharmacy cannot provide, pharmacy staff must inform and [signpost](#) patients and their carer(s) to an appropriate healthcare provider (e.g. to approach an alternative pharmacy for an [emergency supply](#) or to go to A&E if life threatening).
- If pharmacies are unable to make an emergency supply of a medicine the pharmacist should advise the patient and their carer(s) on how to obtain essential medical care. This is supported by the [Pharmacy First service specification](#) which advises: In cases where medication that is urgently required and not in stock the pharmacist, with the agreement of the patient, should identify another pharmacy that provides the service and then forward the electronic referral to them. If the patient is unable to get to the premises to provide options for accessing their medicines. Before referring to an alternative pharmacy, the pharmacist should ensure that the other pharmacy has the required medicine in stock.

Patient Information

- NHS 111 [Emergency prescriptions](#) service to be used in an emergency to get a limited supply when patients have completely run out of medicines.
- NHS [Medicines A to Z](#) provides advice to patients and carer(s) on how to safely use medicines. This patient information is also accessible on the NHS App.

Please continue to record suspected adverse drug reactions to the [Yellow Card scheme](#).

Please continue to record medicine patient safety incidents to [Learning From Patient Safety Events](#).

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