



NPA PRESS RELEASE

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PHARMACISTS CONDEMN PRESCRIPTION CHARGES INCREASE – AND CALL FOR A TOTAL REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM

The National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA), representing the owners of 11,000 pharmacies in the UK, has condemned the latest rise in prescription charges for England – to £6.50 per item – and claims that a fundamental review is urgently needed, as the existing system is outdated, illogical and penalises poorer patients. The Association believes that prescription charges deter many people from getting their prescriptions filled, while many ask their pharmacist for guidance on which medicines they need most when it contains several items. According to the NPA "what can I leave out?" is a common question for local pharmacists to deal with these days.

“We know that prescription charges deter many people from getting medicines which their doctor prescribes. Patients on multiple medications may be forced to make their own, potentially ill-informed decisions about which medicines to forego. This could lead to a second visit to their GP or, if their untreated condition deteriorated, even costly hospital treatment. Sufferers of chronic conditions such as asthma, cystic fibrosis and

multiple sclerosis risk their lives because they cannot afford the treatment they need", said NPA Chief Executive, John D'Arcy.

The NPA has long advocated the abolition of prescription charges – calling them ‘a tax on the sick’ – and is very aware that the system is not only complex, but also riddled with inequities. Although the charges have increased almost every year since 1981, this has had no effect on the total sums of money received by the Government for prescriptions. Almost half the population is exempt from paying – children under 16, students from 16-18, expectant mothers, over 60s, and those living on social security – and because these groups are the heaviest consumers of health care, this means that some 85% of prescription forms carry no charge. The burden falls on adults of working age in employment.

For those people worried that they cannot afford to pay for medicines they need to make them better, the NPA advice is to firstly check whether you are exempt from paying prescription charges. A leaflet (HC11) explains exactly who is entitled to free prescriptions – and your local pharmacist will also be happy to advise you, and answer any questions you may have. If you do have to pay for your prescriptions, and you need a lot of medicines on a regular basis, a prescription prepayment 'season ticket' may be the answer.

As prescription charges have risen, more medicines have become cheaper than prescription medicines when they are bought over the counter at the pharmacy. Your pharmacist will be able to tell you whether any of your prescription items fall into this category – and so help you to save money.

So, if you are at all worried about the cost of your prescriptions, ask your pharmacist – you'll be taking good advice!

Ends

Notes to Editors:

1. The National Pharmaceutical Association (NPA) is the trade association that represents the professional and commercial interests of the owners of around 11,000 community pharmacies in the United Kingdom.
2. The prescription price increase is effective from April 2005 – and will apply only to England. The cost of prepayment certificates will also increase to £33.90 for 4 months or £93.20 for 12 months. The arrangements in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are a matter for their devolved administrations.
3. Pharmacists collect the NHS prescription charge on behalf of the Government – and receive no money for doing this. Any money collected is deducted from the remuneration pharmacists receive for providing NHS Pharmaceutical Services.
4. For more information, or if you would like to arrange an interview, please contact the NPA Press Office, on: 01727 85 86 87, ext. 3340, 3227, 3265 or 3311.