

Press Release



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NPA RESPONSE TO PRESCRIPTION CHARGES INCREASE

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 £6.40 per item. 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.

“Patients on low fixed incomes who do not qualify for exemption suffer the most. 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 - and is very aware that the system is 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 prescription price increase is effective from 1 April 2004 – and applies in England only.**
- 2. For more information, please call the NPA Press Office on: 01727-858687 Exts 3340, 3227, 3265, 3311. Alternatively, e-mail press.office@npa.org.uk**