

## Patient Information Leaflet

### Guidance on Prescriptions after seeing a Private Practitioner

In Northern Ireland, most patients get their medical treatment from the Health and Social Care (HSC) service which means that you don't need to pay anything for the treatment which includes:

- Seeing a healthcare professional such as a GP for advice and/or treatment
- Getting a prescription written for any medicines that you need
- Getting the prescription dispensed by a community pharmacist
- Receiving other treatment such as physiotherapy or having surgery

However sometimes patients may choose to have a private consultation and/or treatment. This is treatment that is provided outside the health service and usually has to be paid for.

This leaflet explains how:

- a prescription which is issued after a private consultation with a private doctor or other private healthcare professional (known as a private prescription) is different to an HSC prescription
- you should get your medicine after a private consultation

#### ***Why am I being given a private prescription?***

If you attend an appointment privately you may be issued with a private prescription. **Private doctors or other private healthcare professionals are not allowed to issue HSC prescriptions. This is because private consultations are not part of the HSC treatment pathway.**

***What is the difference between a private and an HSC prescription?***

A private prescription looks different from an HSC prescription as it is normally written on letterheaded paper or a private prescription form. Unlike an HSC prescription which is free in Northern Ireland, you must pay for a private prescription. The amount that you have to pay for your medicine can vary from pharmacy to pharmacy, as the pharmacy will add a “dispensing fee” onto the cost of the medicine. You may want to ask more than one pharmacy how much they will charge you before having your private prescription dispensed.

***How do I get my medicines dispensed if they are on a private prescription?***

Any community pharmacy can dispense a private prescription. Bring your private prescription directly to your selected pharmacy, and they will give you the medicines you need.

***Can I have my private prescription transferred to an HSC prescription?***

Your GP practice will not usually be able to transfer a private prescription onto an HSC prescription. There are a number of reasons for this which may include:

- **The medicine being recommended on your private prescription is not allowed on an HSC prescription**

Some medicines are not allowed on the HSC (sometimes called blacklisted medicines) which means that your GP cannot write you an HSC prescription for them and you must pay for them.

- **The medicine being recommended is not included in national guidance**

GPs cannot prescribe medicines that are not approved for use in Northern Ireland.

- **The medicine being recommended is not included in the Northern Ireland Formulary**

GPs should prescribe from the Northern Ireland Medication Formulary which is a list of preferred medication choices. Your GP may offer you a preferred NI Formulary alternative on an HSC prescription instead of the medicine on your private prescription.

- **The medicine being recommended is only suitable for specialist or specialised prescribing**

There are some medicines that should usually be prescribed by specialist doctors, often working in hospitals. These medicines should either not be prescribed by GPs at all, or only be prescribed by them when there are clear arrangements in place with the hospital or specialist doctor. GPs would not normally prescribe these medicines on HSC prescription, without ongoing HSC specialist patient input.

- **Your GP may not agree with the choice of medicine being recommended**  
Your GP may not agree with the choice of medicine recommended by your private clinician. You may be offered an alternative on HSC prescription.

- **The medicine is included further down the HSC treatment plan**  
Northern Ireland Formulary recommends other medicines to be tried and considered first, one of these medicines may be offered on HSC prescription.

***If I have any questions or difficulty getting my medicine from a private prescription, what should I do?***

You should speak to the doctor or other healthcare professional that issued the private prescription to discuss what to do next.

***I cannot afford to pay for the treatment privately, what can I do?***

It is important to consider all potential costs before seeing a private doctor or health care professional and this includes medicine costs. If your GP is unable to prescribe the medicine on an HSC prescription, you should speak to the doctor or other healthcare professional that issued you with the private prescription to discuss what to do next. This may include them recommending an alternative less costly medicine or one which may be prescribed by your GP on an HSC prescription, if they are content to do so.

The Northern Ireland Department of Health guidance on HSC patients who wish to pay for additional private care is available on their website at [Guidance on HSC patients who wish to pay for additional private care | Department of Health \(health-ni.gov.uk\)](#)