Briefing Note
Issued 22nd July 2019

Resolving the e-prescribing Interoperability Challenge in Clinical and Medicines Homecare Services for NHS patients

Homecare accounts for up to 25% of the secondary care medicines budget and is relentlessly growing at over 20% year on year. This would rise to 60% if extended to all medicines known to be suitable for homecare. Currently 355,000 patients receive clinical and medicines homecare services. Given the choice, many patients choose to be treated at home rather than in hospital and NHS Five-year-forward view and NHS Long Term Plan anticipates the further extension of clinical homecare services to treat patients in community settings. NCHA is the trade body representing 95% of the clinical and medicines homecare industry.

Clinical and medicines homecare services are an excellent example of inter-organisational provision of healthcare. However, existing guidance and regulation were never intended to cover clinical and medicines homecare services and this provides an interoperability challenge which is blocking initiatives to implement e-prescribing in clinical and medicines homecare services. Resolving this interoperability challenge will support existing and future demand for specialist care in patient’s homes and other community settings and deliver efficiencies. NCHA has a strong track record of stakeholder engagement resulting in agreed data sets and standards that are implemented by all homecare service providers and NHS Purchasing Authorities.

Many hospitals have yet to establish an e-prescribing system that can manage homecare prescriptions. Even where a hospital has an electronic prescribing system there is currently no legally compliant way of sending the electronic prescription from a secondary care setting to a homecare provider. Despite several collaborative projects with the NHS and the National Clinical Homecare Association trying to establish e-prescribing in homecare, there are regulatory blocks meaning a requirement remains for about 1m original paper prescription to be sent to homecare providers each year. Attempts to implement e-trading in homecare have failed as the need for original prescriptions builds in inefficiencies and limits benefits.

NCHA are fully supportive of e-prescribing and would like to remove the need for physical transfer of paper prescriptions at the earliest opportunity. Regulations should allow e-Prescriptions that are valid within hospitals and securely transmitted using appropriate governance processes to be legally valid for dispensing by homecare pharmacies. Work is already underway to agree the standard data sets and secure routes of transmission to meet good governance requirements. However, unless this interoperability challenge is resolved, DHSC and GPhC guidance will still require the generation and physical transfer a signed paper prescription from the NHS Trust to the homecare provider.

In order to resolve this interoperability challenge, NCHA is requesting clarification of the guidance provided by DHSC, NHSE/X and GPhC so that medicines orders issued by hospital systems are valid for dispensing by homecare pharmacies.

We believe this is likely to require

1) Recognition by GPhC that homecare pharmacies operated by NCHA members are hospital pharmacy-like operations and not akin to community or distance-selling pharmacies.
2) Further guidance from DHSC and/or NHSE on the validity of “patient specific orders” generated by hospital e-prescribing systems when dispensed by homecare pharmacies operated by NCHA members.

Enabling tech solutions for e-prescribing in homecare will impact.

4) Improve workforce efficiencies, enabling more patients to be treated at home
5) Unblock initiatives for e-trading in homecare services
6) Improve patient safety and prevent unnecessary admissions by establishing a single electronic record of care
7) Eliminate Information Governance risks of sending original prescription via the post
8) Provide environmental benefits from reducing use of paper

**Background**
The National Clinical Homecare Association (NCHA) is the trade body for the Clinical Homecare Industry representing 95% of the clinical homecare services industry which is valued at £2.8bn. There are approximately 355,000 patients in the UK receiving Clinical Homecare Services. Clinical Homecare patients receive consultant-led care in community settings. The National Clinical Homecare Association (NCHA) aims to raise the awareness of the benefits of Clinical Homecare, and to ensure that high standards are maintained. NCHA publishes the Code of Practice for the Homecare Industry which all NCHA Full and Probationary Members agree to abide by.

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