

Surgery News

Announcements about prescription charges seem to go almost unnoticed these days. I suppose we are so used to being bombarded with depressing economic news that a mere 25 pence per item increase hardly causes a raised eyebrow. Many people these days are exempt from prescription charges anyway, but the bad news for those of us who do have to pay is that the charge per item went up to £7.65 with effect from 1st April.

The better news is that the cost of prescription prepayment certificates (PPCs) has not been increased this year, so anyone who regularly has to take a number of prescription medications shouldn't pay any extra at all. A PPC covering all prescriptions, repeats and one-off items for a full year costs £104 – just £2 per week – and a three month certificate costs £29.10. The annual PPC can even be paid for by direct debit over ten months so that you don't have to find the full cost immediately.

Just out of interest, if you regularly need two prescription items per month, an annual PPC could save you £70; for three items per month the saving can be £160 and for four items the figure goes up to £250, so if you have to pay (and please double check that you do before you splash out), it really is worth doing.

If you want to buy a PPC, you can do it online at <https://apps.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/ppcwebsales/>, by telephone on 0845 850 0030, or you can get the necessary form from your local pharmacy. Please note though, that the direct debit option is not available via pharmacies.

Unfortunately, as prescription charges are a government tax, neither the surgery nor your pharmacy can waive them, much as we might wish we could. I suppose that if you really object to paying them you could move to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, all of which have now abolished charges completely. That's perhaps a bit drastic though.

As I told you a few months ago, Dr Letton is leaving us at the end of June. I promised at the time that I would announce who was to replace her as soon as I could and I can now tell you that Dr Bhatti is going to fill the gap by changing to working full-time.

This will have benefits in that we won't have to go through that difficult time when someone brand new is learning how to work with all our systems and idiosyncrasies. Additionally, her regulars will have more choice about when they can see her. I suppose the only downside will be a sharp increase in the practice's refreshments bill, because she needs frequent topping-up with chocolate whenever she gets busy. It will be nice to have her around more often anyway.

There have been some interesting pieces in the media recently about the overuse of antibiotics and its worrying consequences. Bacteria that were once dealt with very effectively by antibiotics are becoming increasingly resistant. This means that illnesses such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, meningitis – even ear infections and some skin conditions are becoming more dangerous and harder to treat. You don't have to take my word for it – just Google "Antibiotic overuse" and be prepared to be scared.

I make no apologies for jumping on the bandwagon and asking you again to help us avoid adding to the problem by not putting pressure on doctors (or nurses) to prescribe antibiotics when they make it clear that it is not appropriate to do so. The pressure most often comes from parents who are understandably distressed when their child is ill and expect antibiotics to be a quick fix. Very often, they aren't though.

Believe me – this isn't a cost thing. Antibiotics cost pennies – in most cases literally. The simple truth is that they have absolutely no effect on viral illnesses, including colds, flu and many childhood ailments. They are completely wasted and gradually lose their efficacy against the nasty bacterial infections that they have

helped keep at bay for the last few decades. Inevitably this will eventually put your child at greater risk when they contract something that does need dealing with by antibiotics.

So the message is **please** when you are told that antibiotics are not appropriate, accept what the doctor or nurse says. They are not being unsympathetic or trying to be difficult. They are not saving money. They are trying to make sure that there are still antibiotics that work when you – or your child – really need them.

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