

**IMPORTANT MESSAGE:** Licensed medicines should be used where possible.

Special-order medicines are unlicensed and expensive and should only be used if there is no licensed alternative.

A stepwise approach is suggested:

## STEP 1

### Review the need for each medication.

Stop medicines that aren't needed or aren't working.

## ESCALATING COSTS IN WIRRAL

'Specials' are often considerably more expensive than licensed medicines and the cost of 'specials' in Wirral has **trebled** in the last 3 years. Unlicensed medicines should only be used when there is no suitable licensed alternative. However, ePACT data has shown that in some cases 'specials' have been prescribed when there is a licensed alternative available. The top liquid 'special', by cost, prescribed on Wirral last year was **OMEPRAZOLE LIQUID 20mg/5ml**, with **£49,443** being spent. The cost for the year if omeprazole dispersible tablets had been used would have been £1,772 and if lansoprazole orodispersible tablets had been used, just £457.

## Why licensed status matters

Special-order medicines ('specials') are unlicensed and are not required to meet the same standards as licensed medicines.

Clinical and legal responsibility for the use of unlicensed medicines rests with the prescriber. Therefore, careful thought should be taken before prescribing an unlicensed preparation and the prescriber should be able to justify and feel competent in using such medicines.

## How do I know if a medicine is unlicensed?

If a medicine or form of a medicine is not listed in the BNF then it is likely to be unlicensed. The BNF does list some unlicensed products or uses of medicines but it clearly identifies these. GP clinical systems also identify some 'specials' and ScriptSwitch will 'flag up' commonly used 'specials'. A licensed medicine will have been issued a Marketing Authorisation (MA) number by the MHRA following a rigorous assessment process. This number must be displayed on the pack. An unlicensed medicine will not have an MA number on the pack.

## STEP 2

### Use a licensed medicine in a suitable formulation.

For example:

- Licensed liquid preparation
- Soluble tablets
- Powders or granules for suspension

In order to use a licensed medicine, consider switching to a different agent in the same class, or to a different route of administration.

For example, consider:

- Fluoxetine liquid (licensed preparation) as an alternative to sertraline tablets.
- Aspirin dispersible tablets instead of clopidogrel tablets.
- HRT patches instead of tablets.

**Care staff may only give licensed medicines in an unlicensed way if there is a written direction in the patient's care plan.**

**Practical directions are overleaf.**

## STEP 3

### Use a licensed medicine in an unlicensed manner, for example by crushing / dispersing tablets in water or by opening capsules.

For example:

- Ramipril capsules can be opened and the contents mixed with water.
- Bendroflumethiazide tablets can be dispersed in water.

Both the above examples are suitable for administration orally or via a feeding tube.

Not all medicines are suitable for administration in this way and it is important to check beforehand. See overleaf for where to get advice.

As before, consider switching to a different agent or route of administration in order to use a licensed product.

## STEP 4

### In the few situations where there is no licensed option, consider using a 'special'.

Special-order ('special') liquid medicines are unlicensed and expensive. They should only be used if there is no licensed medicine that meets the patient's needs.

## Choosing medicines for patients unable to take solid oral dosage forms

### Practical directions

**Always check beforehand if a tablet is suitable for dispersing / crushing, or a capsule suitable for opening. (See the 'where can I get advice?' section).**

#### • **Crushing / dispersing tablets**

Many immediate-release tablets can be dispersed in water without crushing; some medicines need crushing first. Some tablets (e.g. modified release) are not suitable for crushing.

For medicines that are suitable for crushing, crush using a tablet crusher, a pestle and mortar or between two metal spoons.

Only crush medicines one tablet at a time; do not crush all the patient's medicines together. Crushing or dispersal should only be performed immediately before administration.

#### • **Opening capsules**

Some hard gelatin capsules can be opened and their contents mixed with water or administered with food. Some capsules are too small to manipulate. Capsules should only be opened immediately before administration.

#### • **Giving medicines in liquids or soft food**

Some capsule contents or crushed tablets can be given with a small amount of cold liquid or cold soft food such as a teaspoon of yoghurt or jam. Use a small amount of food to ensure the full dose is taken; if taken with a meal, add medicine to the first mouthful of food.

Crushed tablets or capsule contents may taste very bitter to patients taking them orally. Mask the taste by giving with strong flavours such as blackcurrant.

Medicines should only be administered in food with the patient's knowledge and consent. Hiding medicines in food is considered 'covert administration' and is only condoned in certain circumstances.

#### • **Administering medicines via feeding tubes**

Medicines should be administered one at a time and the feeding tube should be flushed with water before and after each medicine is administered.

Some patients may be fluid restricted and this will need to be taken into account. Please consult the patient's dietitian for advice on fluid requirements.

The NHS Wirral Standard Operating Procedure for administration of medicines via enteral feeding tubes should be followed.

It is found at the following link:

[http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/document\\_uploads/Policies\\_and\\_Procedures\\_Nursing/NP\\_MM15-SOPMedicinesviaEnteralFeedingTubes.pdf](http://www.wirral.nhs.uk/document_uploads/Policies_and_Procedures_Nursing/NP_MM15-SOPMedicinesviaEnteralFeedingTubes.pdf)

**Care staff may only administer medicines in an unlicensed manner on the instruction of the prescriber.**

**A written direction to crush or disperse tablets or to open capsules must be documented in the patient's care plan.**

### Where can I get advice?

- **NHS Wirral Guidance on Unlicensed and 'Off-label' Medicines** is available at the link below:

[http://www.wirralhealth.nhs.uk/document\\_uploads/Medicines\\_Management/WirralSpecials\\_Mar11.pdf](http://www.wirralhealth.nhs.uk/document_uploads/Medicines_Management/WirralSpecials_Mar11.pdf)

- This document gives advice on choosing therapeutic alternatives for patients unable to swallow solid dosage forms and recommends if tablets or capsules can be dispersed, crushed or opened for the most commonly prescribed 'specials' on Wirral (by cost).

- If the medicine required is not listed in this guidance please contact **NHS Wirral Medicines Management Team** on:

0151 643 5338

#### • **References**

Details of a useful UKMI Medicines Q&A and two respected texts are at the bottom of the page.

**Only prescribe special-order medicines if there is no suitable licensed medicine available that meets the patient's needs.**

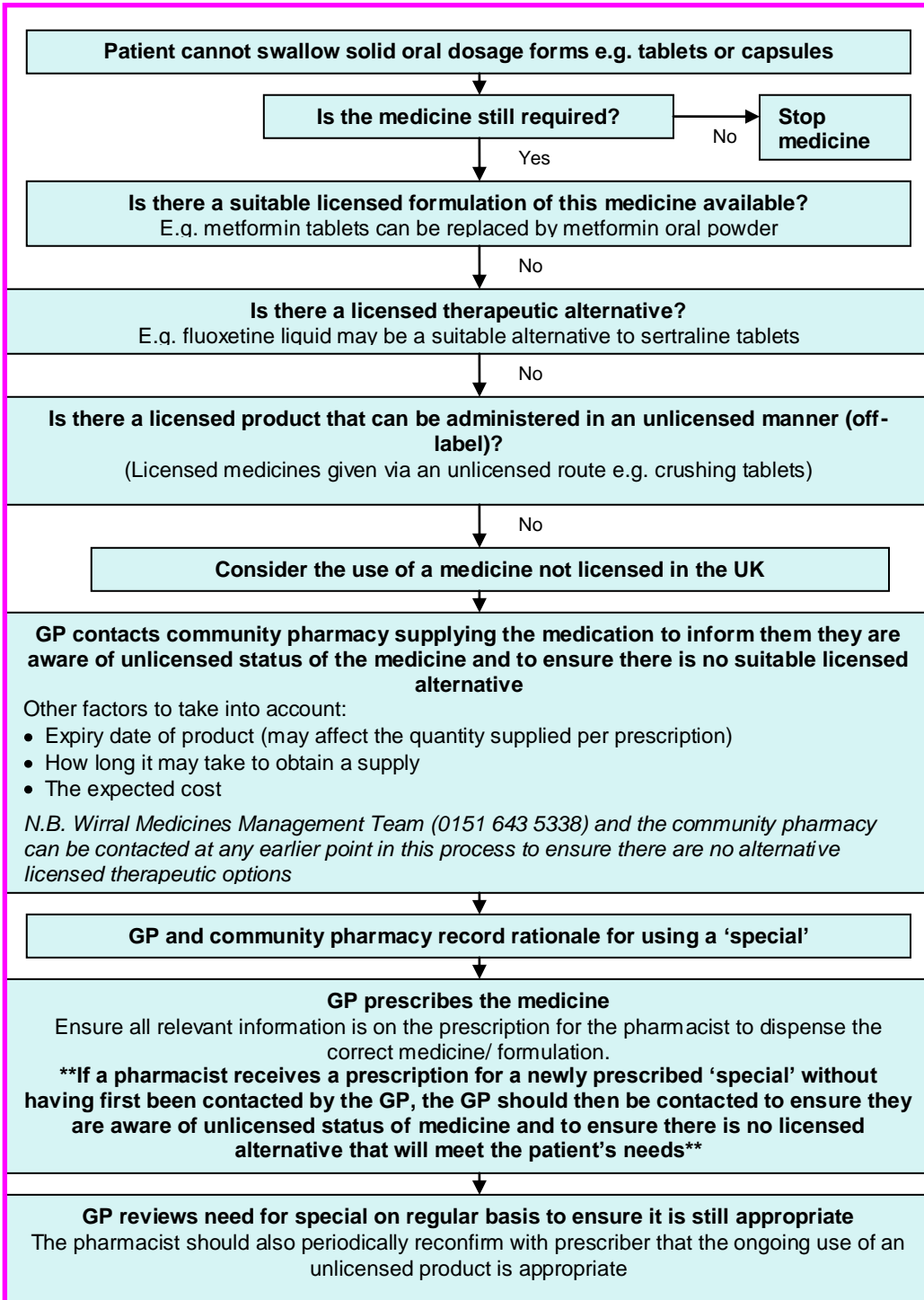
**It may be appropriate to use a licensed medicine in an unlicensed way.**

#### References:

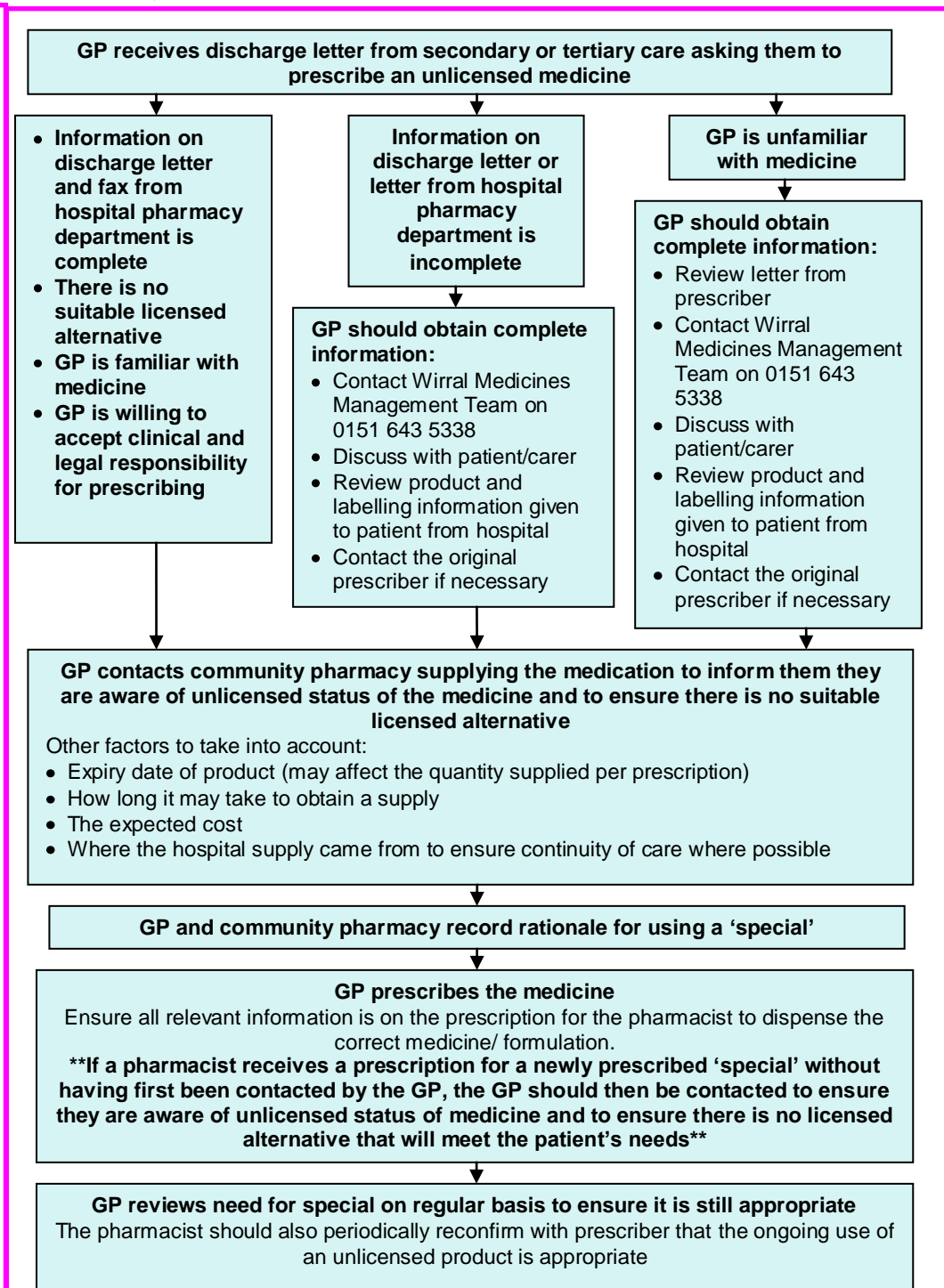
- UKMi. Medicines Q&A 294.2: Therapeutic options for patients unable to take solid oral dosage forms. January 2011. Available online at: [www.nelm.nhs.uk/en/NeLM-Area/Evidence/Medicines-Q--A/Therapeutic-options-for-patients-unable-to-take-solid-oral-dosage-forms/](http://www.nelm.nhs.uk/en/NeLM-Area/Evidence/Medicines-Q--A/Therapeutic-options-for-patients-unable-to-take-solid-oral-dosage-forms/)
- White R and Bradnam V. Handbook of drug administration via enteral feeding tubes, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Pharmaceutical Press; 2010.
- Smyth J. The NEWT Guidelines for administration of medication to patients with enteral feeding tubes or swallowing difficulties, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Wrexham: North East Wales NHS Trust; 2010.

Date of preparation and PEC approval: **Sept 2010**  
(updated **March 2011**)

## GUIDE TO ALTERNATIVES TO TABLETS/CAPSULES



## REQUESTS FROM SECONDARY OR TERTIARY CARE



Special	Therapeutic alternatives for adult patients
Amitriptyline Liquid 10mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> Amitriptyline oral solution 25mg/5ml and 50mg/5ml are available. Oral syringes can be used to measure smaller doses.
Amlodipine Liquid 5mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations:</b> There are no suitable licensed formulations of amlodipine <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Amlodipine tablets can be crushed and dispersed in 10ml water for administration orally or via feeding tubes
Bendroflumethiazide Liquid 2.5mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations:</b> There are no suitable licensed formulations of bendroflumethiazide or other thiazide diuretics. <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Bendroflumethiazide tablets can be dispersed in 10ml water and given orally or via a feeding tube.
Clonazepam Liquid 500mcg/5ml and 2mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> There are no suitable licensed formulations of clonazepam. <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Clonazepam tablets can be dispersed in 10ml water for administration orally or via a feeding tube.
Omeprazole Liquid 20mg/5ml and 40mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> Lansoprazole orodispersible tablets can be allowed to disperse in the mouth then swallowed, or mixed with 10ml water to give a dispersion of small (0.33mm) granules for administration orally or via a feeding tube. Omeprazole dispersible tablets can be mixed with water to give a dispersion of small granules that can be given orally or first mixed with fruit juice, apple sauce or yoghurt; care must be taken not to crush or chew the granules. <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Omeprazole dispersible tablets can be mixed with water to give a dispersion of small (0.5mm) granules. The granules have a tendency to block fine bore feeding tubes but can be mixed with water or 8.4% sodium bicarbonate for administration via wider feeding tubes.
Paracetamol Liquid 500mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> Paracetamol soluble tablets and paracetamol 120mg/5ml and 250mg/5ml oral suspensions available.
Phenobarbital Liquid 50mg/5ml (alcohol free)	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> Phenobarbital elixir 15mg/5ml is available. It contains 38% alcohol so may not be considered suitable for children. It may be given via a feeding tube for adults. <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Phenobarbital tablets may be crushed and mixed with 10ml water.
Ramipril Liquid 5mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> There are no suitable licensed formulations of ACE inhibitors available. <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Ramipril capsules can be opened and the contents mixed with 15ml water or food. Ramipril tablets can be dispersed in 10ml water
Sertraline Liquid 50mg/5ml	<b>Licensed medicines in suitable formulations</b> There are no suitable licensed formulations of sertraline but other SSRIs are available in suitable licensed formulations: Fluoxetine 20mg/5ml oral liquid Citalopram 40mg/ml oral drops Escitalopram oral drops 10mg/ml and 20mg/ml Paroxetine 10mg/5ml oral suspension <b>Licensed medicines used in an unlicensed manner</b> Sertraline tablets can be crushed but do not disperse readily in water. They will disintegrate if shaken in 10ml water for a few minutes and can be given orally or via a feeding tube. Crushed tablets can be mixed with food but have a bitter taste