

## Explanatory notes for the Prescription Cost Analysis

### Prescribing statistics

Prescription statistics published here are based on information obtained from prescriptions sent to Primary Care Services, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership for payment. Data captured by Primary Care Services in the prescription pricing and remuneration process are also available on their [website](#).

A large amount of complex data on prescriptions is available from these sources and should be interpreted with the explanatory notes provided. Contact details are provided in case users require further data or advice on interpretation.

### Source

Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data are based on information obtained from prescriptions sent to the Primary Care Services Unit, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership for payment.

### Coverage

The statistics cover all prescriptions dispensed by community pharmacies, appliance contractors and dispensing doctors in Wales including items personally administered by General Medical Practitioners. The vast majority of prescriptions are written by General Medical Practitioners in Wales; however prescriptions written by non-medical prescribers, dentists and hospital doctors are also included provided they were dispensed in the community. Also included are prescriptions written in England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in Wales. The analyses do not include prescriptions written in Wales but dispensed outside Wales.

### PCA data format

The prescription items dispensed are listed according to the British National Formulary (BNF) therapeutic class, chapters, sections, sub-paragraphs, chemicals, products and individual preparations. Note that in some years the names describing particular classifications have changed eg Chapter 02 (Cardiovascular drugs), section 06 has been described variously as: 'Nit, Calc Blockers & Potassium Activators', 'Nit, Calc Block & Other Antianginal Drugs' and 'Nit'.

### Interpreting the PCA data

When interpreting the data it should be noted that the PCA data covers a wide variety of types of prescription items including tablets, creams, liquid preparations, food products related to special diets, and dressings and appliances. They can all be counted as prescription items and a cost attached to each but special care should be taken when aggregating individual items or calculating costs per unit. In particular note that a prescription item consists of a quantity of tablets or other preparation. This means that the cost per item does not equate to the cost, for example, per tablet or per pack of tablets but to the average number of packs prescribed per item. The amount of a medicine dispensed is indicated in the data as the quantity, "Qty". This quantity may be measured in a variety of units, for example, in units (tablets, capsules etc) or in millilitres or grammes. Some indication of the type of unit is given in the Standard quantity unit (StdQtyUnit) column in the data but this does not help calculate exact unit costs without knowledge of pack sizes, sizes / weights of food products, types of appliances and so on. "

## Examples of extracting data

1. You may require data on all Simvastatin preparations:
  - Open the spreadsheet called Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) Individual Preparations.
  - The spreadsheet is sorted alphabetically by Column C (BNF Chemical Name) so you should be able to find all rows with "Simvastatin" in that column.
  - A number of different drugs are named in Column B which all come under the chemical name of "Simvastatin".
  - Some of these drugs are prescribed in tablet form, some in alternate formulations, some in combination products and all at a variety of strengths.
  - In total 2,195,090 prescription items were dispensed during 2017 for simvastatin at a total Net Ingredient Cost (NIC) of £2,030,112.53.
  - A prescription item may equate to a variable number of tablets or preparations and it would be misleading therefore to aggregate the "Quantity" column (column M). The Standard Quantity Unit (SQU) column provides some information as to what the unit of Quantity is ie units (tablets, capsules, pack, aerosol etc), millilitres or grammes.
  - Looking at a specific drug: 423 items of Zocor\_Tab 20mg were dispensed in 2017 at a cost (NIC) of £15,082.45. This provided 14,224 tablets of the drug (Qty) at an average cost of £1.06 per tablet. The average cost per item was £35.66 and the average number of tablets per item was 33.6 (Qty/Items).
2. You may want to know about prescriptions of foods for special diets, gluten free bread, for example:
  - Open one of the spreadsheet called 'individual preparations' - either the current year or the version including all years from 2000. The spreadsheet is sorted by Column C (BNF Chemical Name) so you should be able to find all rows with "Gluten Free Bread" in that column but note that it might also appear as something similar eg "Gluten Free / Wheat Free Bread"
  - **Note:** There are a wide variety of types of bread which may be prescribed including different brands and sizes of loaf. These are listed in Column B. For each of the types of bread listed the cost (NIC) is provided together with the number of items prescribed. A single prescription item will normally be for several loaves of bread. The quantity measure "Qty" here is grammes.

Any analysis should bear in mind the complexity of the data. Contact details of where advice can be obtained are provided at the end of this note.

## Definitions

### BNF

The British National Formulary (BNF) is a joint publication of the British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society. It is published biannually under the authority of a Joint Formulary Committee which comprises representatives of the two professional bodies and of the UK Health Departments.

### Therapeutic classification

PCA data are based on the therapeutic grouping used in the British National Formulary.

NHS Prescription Services have created pseudo-BNF chapters, for items that cannot be found in BNF chapters 1 to 15. The majority of these items are dressings and appliances, which NHS Prescription Services have classified into four pseudo-BNF chapters (20 to 23). However some gel and colloid dressings that are classified as drugs are included in a pseudo section within BNF 13 (13.13). NHS Prescription Services have produced [a booklet on BNF classifications and the pseudo classifications used](#).

### Drug name

The drug is shown by individual preparation name, which may be proprietary (trade name) or generic (chemical name), followed by form and strength. The names used are often presented in an abbreviated form.

### Items dispensed

A prescription item refers to a single item prescribed by a doctor (or dentist) on a prescription form. If a prescription form includes three items it is counted as three prescription items. A prescription item may be for a variable quantity eg 14, 28 or 56 tablets.

### Cost: Net Ingredient Cost (NIC)

NIC refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees. It does not include any adjustment where the patient has purchased a pre-payment certificate.

### PropGenLinkCode

This code is a way of linking the brand to the generic for a given chemical ingredient and is derived from the first 9 and last 2 characters of the BNF code.

### Quantity (QTY)

The quantity of a drug dispensed is measured in units depending on the formulation of the product. See standard quantity unit below. Quantities are not added together across preparations because of different strengths and formulations.

### Standard quantity unit (StdQtyUnit)

This code indicates the form of the drug and the units in which quantity is measured:

Code 1 - a unit (e.g. one tablet, capsule, pack, aerosol etc)

Code 3 - millilitres

Code 6 - grammes

Code 0 - individually formulated (unit varies)

**Exact costs and numbers of items are provided but we would recommend that any data extracted for use are presented in a rounded form.**

**Further details can be obtained from:**

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Companies House  
Crown Way  
Cardiff CF14 3UZ  
Telephone: 029 20 904048  
email: [prescribing.management@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:prescribing.management@wales.nhs.uk)

Or

Deirdre Leigh  
Health, Social Services and Population Statistics  
Welsh Government  
Cathays Park,  
Cardiff CF10 3NQ  
Telephone: 0300 025 5036  
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