



Preventing Prescription Switching

Under the previous manual NHS Prescription Services processes, only a sample of prescriptions from every bundle was checked to confirm that prescriptions had been correctly submitted. As part of the CIP process, high speed scanners support the collection of information on the prescription charge status of all prescriptions. This has been the key reason for the increase in prescription switching by NHS Prescription Services following the implementation of pricing via CIP. Where the CIP system's intelligent character recognition software identifies that a prescription has been submitted to the NHS Prescription Services in an incorrect bundle, the form is referred to an NHS Prescription Services operative (an exception handler) to assess whether the prescription charge status should be 'switched' or not. An exception handler always makes the final decision as to whether a prescription should be 'switched'. PSNC switching audits show that there is now a high level of accuracy by NHS Prescription Services with regard to switching.

To prevent prescription switching the declaration on the back of a prescription form must be completed **and signed** on all occasions except:

- Where the patient is aged under 16, or 60 or over and the date of birth has been computer generated and printed on the front of the prescription form. (NB: NHS Prescription Services will treat the prescription as exempt).
- Where the prescription is for a prisoner on release and the practice address box on the front of the form includes the printed letters 'HMP' along with the issuing prison address and PCT allocated number.
- From 1st August 2010, any patient who presents an NHS Northern Irish prescription form (coded HS21CS) will not pay a prescription charge for any items on that form that are dispensed in England. The HS21CS Form does not include a prescription charge exemption tick box and declaration section on the reverse of the form.

In cases where the back of the form must be completed and the prescription is submitted to NHS Prescription Services in the 'exempt' bundle without a signature and mark (for example tick or cross) in one of the exemption boxes, the prescription will be 'switched' to the 'paid' bundle and prescription charges may be deducted.

There is no exception from the requirement to obtain a completed exemption declaration on the grounds that the patient has been prescribed a contraceptive. If these prescriptions are submitted in the exempt bundle with an incomplete patient exemption declaration, the prescription will be switched but NHS Prescription Services will not deduct a charge where the prescription is for a contraceptive medicine or device included in the list of products to be supplied to patients free of charge (Part XVI 10. of the Drug Tariff). Care should be taken to ensure that the appropriate declarations are completed on prescriptions ordering Dianette/Cocypriindol where the prescriber has indicated that it is for contraceptive use.

Patients who are 59 when a script is issued but 60 when the script is presented do not need to pay for their prescription. However they will need to sign and date the back of the prescription. The script should be clearly annotated on the back of the prescription to show that patient was 60 when the script was presented.

If the date of birth is not clear on the prescription (e.g. maybe it has been obliterated by the pharmacy stamp or is outside the d.o.b box) then the contractor needs to ensure that a declaration of exemption is made as the prescription will be passed to an exception handler for a decision regarding switching and a switch will be made if there is insufficient information regarding the exemption from payment.

Key points to note:

The signature should be in Part 3 (the signature box), however if the patient has incorrectly signed in the social security details box or on the address line, the prescription will not be switched.

It is acceptable to use a pharmacy stamp to provide the address information required on a prescription where a member of the pharmacy staff is signing as a representative of the patient, however a pharmacy stamp alone is not accepted as a signature in a declaration of exemption. Without a signature, a prescription will be switched.

Certain patients that claim exemptions linked to income are required to declare their NI number in Part 1 of the form. However, prescriptions will not be switched provided that the appropriate exemption box is marked and the prescription signed. If evidence has not been seen a cross should be marked in the 'Evidence not Seen' box.

Prescription switching statistics can be found on the Contractor's Schedule of Payments. It is important to monitor this closely, for example to ensure that staff members are following SOPs to ensure that exemption declarations are completed, where required.

For further support on this issue, please contact the Information Team (0844 381 4180 – option 1)