



**West Kent
Clinical Commissioning Group**

Gluten-free services in west Kent

November 2016

**Patient focused,
providing quality,
improving outcomes**

Summary

This paper provides a briefing for the Kent Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the proposal by NHS West Kent CCG to stop routine prescriptions for gluten-free products for people with coeliac disease.

The CCG is about to start a consultation on this process to find out whether people who fund and use West Kent NHS services agree with this proposal and if there are any groups who would be particularly impacted by the change.

Recommendation

Members of the HOSC are asked to note the contents of this report.

Background

All of the NHS, social care and public health in Kent and Medway are working together to develop ideas for a shared plan for the future. This will be a Sustainability and Transformation Plan (STP) that will set out how we think services need to change over the next five years to achieve the right care for people for decades to come and to cope with demand that is rising every year.

Every health and social care organisation is also reviewing each aspect of its work to see where improvements can be made, how waste can be reduced and productivity improved to make sure we provide the best value services with the workforce and money available.

As part of this, West Kent CCG has been reviewing the all the services, aids and medicines it provides to identify potential savings which would not have a detrimental effect on the health of those affected.

We are consulting on gluten free as we recognise this will be a change of service for those people currently receiving these products by prescription.

Current situation:

In England, the current annual spend on gluten-free (GF) products is £24.7 million (based on ePACT data April to June 2014), which is significant. Given the current challenges facing the NHS, prescribers need to ensure a fair use of resources for all their patients. There are several conditions which require specialist diets as part of the treatment (for example, lactose intolerance or nut allergies). However, coeliac disease is the only one to receive specialist diet foods on prescription.

Coeliac disease is a common digestive condition where a person has an adverse reaction to gluten. Patients who are diagnosed as having coeliac disease should follow a strict gluten-free diet.

Patients who meet Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) indications are prescribed gluten-free foods on free prescription which include:

- Gluten-sensitive enteropathies including steatorrhoea due to gluten sensitivity where the immune system reacts to gluten damaging the surface of the small bowel (intestines), disrupting the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food
- Coeliac Disease, proven by biopsy
- Dermatitis herpetiformis (a skin condition linked to coeliac disease).

Historically, availability of gluten-free foods was low. Therefore, obtaining these products from community pharmacies via prescriptions improved access to them. However, with increased awareness of coeliac disease and gluten sensitivity, this has led to better labelling and information.

A general trend towards eating less gluten also means there is more demand for gluten-free foods and more availability of gluten-free products.

A wide and expanding range of gluten-free foods is available from supermarkets and online. This means the requirement to prescribe items for a person maintaining a gluten-free diet has been reduced and now does not represent value for money.

The current spend on gluten-free prescribing in west Kent is £130,000.

The proposal

NHS West Kent CCG faces substantial budgetary challenges. In reviewing our prescribing budget to ensure we are spending it in the most effective and equitable way, we feel the money spent on gluten-free prescriptions can be spent on other services without having a significant impact on the health of those affected.

The CCG therefore proposes to stop the routine prescribing of gluten-free items.

Exceptions to the proposal

There are a group of patients who have “an in born error of metabolism” called Phenylketouria (PKU) – who can only have low protein food. Even some of the foods (vegetables, fish, meat, eggs) that are available to a person on a gluten-free diet, cannot be eaten by a patient with PKU. Therefore patients diagnosed with PKU will be allowed “healthy” low protein products on prescription.

The consultation

The consultation will start in mid November and will run to mid-January.

It will include:

- A consultation document and questionnaire
- A public event to discuss any prevalent issues
- Targeting interested groups such as parents in children’s centres, schools, local coeliac society, disability forums
- Working with partners such as Healthwatch Kent to share the information
- Patient Participation Group chairs and the West Kent Health Network to promote consultation across the area
- Stands and attendance at public events and places with high footfall to promote the consultation
- Banners and dedicated pages on the CCG website
- Social media activity via the CCG’s Facebook and Twitter pages
- Press releases to local media.

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