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**Accuracy**

All prescription statistics in this bulletin are based on information systems at NHS Prescription Services, part of the NHS Business Services Authority. The system used is the Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA). The figures used are collected as an essential part of the process of reimbursing dispensers (mainly pharmacists and dispensing doctors) for medicines supplied. All prescriptions which are dispensed in England need to be submitted to NHS Business Services Authority if the dispenser is to be reimbursed and so coverage should be complete.

NHS Prescription Services quality assures the data they provide. They state that due to the complex and manual processes involved there may be random inaccuracies in capturing prescription information which are then reflected in the data. Currently the prescription processing activity is internally audited to 99 per cent accuracy (i.e. at least 99 per cent of prescriptions are recorded accurately). Data is downloaded and collated on a quarterly basis by NHS Digital and validated against published tables from NHS Prescription Services to ensure accuracy.

Further details are available from the NHS Business Services Authority at: http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/PrescriptionServices/3751.aspx

**Relevance**

This is the Prescription Cost Analysis National Statistic, published in April, each year, which lists all prescription items dispensed in England for the previous calendar year.

This publication is considered to be of particular interest to commissioners and policy makers to monitor levels of medicine use and cost. However, data and findings are likely also to be of interest to a much broader base of users. NHS Digital is keen to gain a better understanding of the users of this publication and of their needs; feedback is welcome and may be sent to enquiries@nhsdigital.nhs.uk (please include ‘Prescribing’ in the subject line).

**Comparability and Coherence**

The PCA system records all prescriptions dispensed in England. These prescriptions will have been written by general practitioners and other prescribers, including dentists and those written in hospitals, which were then dispensed in the community.

As such, it differs from the prescribing information system provided by NHS Prescription Services to the NHS via the internet. This information is prescriber-based and records all prescriptions written in England, regardless of where they were dispensed. Prescriptions written by dentists and those written in hospitals are not included in these figures.
Users can misinterpret PCA data as relating to numbers of patients but care should be taken as PCA data relates to prescription items dispensed not individuals. One individual may have a prescription item, for the same medicine, dispensed a number of times over a year.

**UK comparisons**

Separate collections of PCA data are undertaken by Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There are a number of important differences between the countries in the way that data measures are collected and classified, and because of differences between countries in the organisation of health and social services. For these reasons, any comparisons made between PCA and other UK data should be treated with caution.

**Comparisons over time**

The earliest ‘Prescription Cost Analysis’ publication produced by NHS Digital includes PCA data from 2004. Previous publications can be found at:

https://digital.nhs.uk/search?q=%22Prescription+Cost+Analysis+(PCA)+provides+details+of+the+number+of+items+and+the+net+ingredient+cost+%22&s=r

Data from 1998 to 2003 is available on the Department for Health’s website:

[ARCHIVED CONTENT] Pharmacies and prescriptions: statistics : Department of Health - Publications

Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of changes in available medicines and their cost, and changes in NHS practice. For example, a reduction in items dispensed for a particular medicine may be due to the introduction of alternative medicines, or a change in prescribing behaviour, especially in the length of treatment each item is intended to cover.

All medicines are shown by their latest BNF classification and proprietary or generic class. Historic data included in the latest publication may not match data previously published. Users should always use the data in the latest publication.

**Changes to clinical classifications**

PCA uses the therapeutic classifications defined in the British National Formulary (BNF) using the classification system prior to BNF edition 70. Further information about these classifications, and changes to them, can be found at:


The latest pseudo BNF can be found at:

https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/sites/default/files/2017-04/BNF_Classification_Booklet-2017_0.pdf
**Timeliness and punctuality**

Prescription Cost Analysis is published in April each year. The publication date is determined by the availability of the data from NHS Prescription Services and allows adequate time for the compilation of the report.

**Accessibility**

This publication is available annually in April.

**Performance cost and respondent burden**

The figures used in this publication are collected as part of the process of reimbursing dispensers for drugs supplied. The publication therefore uses an existing administrative source.

**Confidentiality, Transparency and Security**

The standard NHS Digital data security and confidentiality policies have been applied in the production of these statistics.