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Information for patients Special Medicines



Pharmacy

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Most medicines prescribed in this country are approved for use by the government's Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency.

This leaflet is intended to explain why doctors may sometimes prescribe treatments that are used outside this approval process.

Why Are Medicines Usually 'Officially Approved'?

With a few exceptions medicines that are prescribed or sold in this country are approved for use by the government's Medicine and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA). This helps ensure that medicines:

- are effective.
- do not cause too many side effects.
- are manufactured to approved standards.

In order to provide patients with the best or most suitable treatment, it is sometimes necessary for doctors and pharmacists to supply medicines that have not gone through this approval process. They will not do this unless they believe the medicine to be safe and effective. It is also sometimes necessary to use medicines for uses other than those for which they have been approved.

In this leaflet treatments that have not gone through this approval process are called 'Special treatments'.

Why Do Doctors Prescribe / Use 'Special Treatments'?

- Research may have shown that the treatment is better than one that has been officially approved, but the manufacturer may not have asked for the treatment to be approved, or may be waiting for approval.
- It may be that no other effective treatment is available - this is often the case with some rare diseases.
- A medicine may only be approved for use in one group of patients (e.g. adults), but doctors may have found that it also works for others (e.g. children). They may wish to use it in these patients, if it is the most effective or appropriate treatment available.
- The medicine may not have gone through the approval process because it is one that needs to be made up specially e.g. a liquid medicine that has to be made so that a child can swallow easily.

What Differences Might I Notice If I am Prescribed/Supplied with a Special Treatment?

- Your doctor or pharmacist may tell you that the treatment has not been officially approved (or licensed), but will normally explain that it is safe and effective, and why it is the preferred treatment.
- In some cases your doctor or pharmacist may give you some separate information about the medicine. If this is written please read it carefully, and follow any instructions you are given.

- You may notice that a manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with the medicine is not 'quite right'. For instance, you may notice that it does not include information about the condition for which you are being treated, or about the use of the medicine in children or older people, or it may state a dose that is different from that which the doctor prescribed.
- Many of these medicines have to be made up specially or may take longer to obtain than other medicines. Your pharmacist may therefore need to make special arrangements for the supply of the medicine. You may also be told that it will be necessary for you to ask the doctor for another prescription up to two weeks before the next supply of the medicine is needed.

Doctors and pharmacists will only prescribe / supply one of these 'special treatments' when it is considered to be the most appropriate treatment. The fact a treatment has not gone through the government's official process does not mean that it is less effective, less safe or of a poorer quality than one that has.

What Do I Do If I Want More Information?

If you

- have any worries or concerns about any
- medicine, or
- information you have been given with the medicine,
- are confused or not sure about any information or directions you have been given, or
- just want more information.

Please talk to your doctor or pharmacist. They have lots of knowledge and experience with medicines and will be pleased to answer your queries.

What If I Am Unhappy About Taking / Using a 'Special' Treatment?

If you have any concerns at all talk it over with your doctor or pharmacist. Tell them what you are worried about and why.

He/she can

- give you more information about the treatment,
- explain why it is believed to be the most suitable, and
- discuss other treatments that may be available

Nobody can force you to take or use any treatment that you do not want.