

Potential Changes to Your Antiretroviral Medication

Brownlee Centre, Gartnavel General Hospital

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde (NHSGGC) is constantly reviewing the medicines that we prescribe with a view to using the most cost-effective options while still providing a high quality of care.

This may mean when you attend your appointment, the staff may review your current medications to check it is still the best option for your care. HIV medications change frequently and since you started treatment there may be something more suitable for you and more cost effective. Often this may just be switching to a generic version of your current medications, or it may involve changing to different treatment.

If you are changing to a different medication, we will always discuss this with you first and the quality of your care will not be compromised.

Please make sure you make a note of the name, dose and strength of each medication you are taking and check these details each time you receive a new supply. If you have any concerns, please contact the Brownlee Pharmacy on ☎ 0141 211 3383.

What are Generic drugs?

When new drugs are created, they are protected by patents, so only the brand-name version can be prescribed. After the patent expires, other companies can make and sell the same drug as a generic or unbranded version.

Most medications prescribed by the NHS are **generics** which are typically less expensive than branded versions.

In the UK there are strict quality controls for both branded and generic versions of medicines. If your medication changes to a generic form it is nothing to worry about – the drug is the same and of the same quality, even if the medicine and the packaging look different. The NHS may use different generics to ensure best value and reliable supply so the appearance of the packaging or tablets may **change**. We don't always know when this will happen as a lot of our medication is supplied by homecare companies rather than our own pharmacy.

Example: The generic tablet containing abacavir + lamivudine or tenofovir-disoproxil + emtricitabine may come from different suppliers, so the colour or shape of the tablets and the packaging may differ, but the active drug is the same.

We already use generic HIV medications and as more become available we may ask you to change from a branded to a generic product. **If this means increasing the number of tablets you take we will discuss this with you first, otherwise the change may happen automatically.**



Occasionally the tablet strength may also differ. This is why **we ask you check the strength and dose of your medications each time you receive a new supply.**

Example: Lamivudine comes in 150mg and 300mg strengths; you will either need to take **two** or **one** a day depending on the dose.

Single Tablet Regimens (STR)

When a full antiretroviral regimen is formulated into a single tablet which you take once a day, this is known as a **Single Tablet Regimens (STR)** (e.g. Eviplera, Triumeq). Combining the individual medicines in this way makes taking them more convenient for many individuals and for this reason are commonly prescribed.

Previously, there was no real cost difference in prescribing an STR versus prescribing the different individual antiretroviral drugs. However, generic versions of some common HIV drugs are now available, and it may cost a lot more to prescribe an STR, in comparison to prescribing the medicines separately as two or three tablets each day. For this reason, we may ask patients on STRs to switch to the same medicines prescribed as separate pills or switch to a different STR which is more cost effective. If there are important reasons for you to be on a specific STR we will not force you to switch unless we are unable to access this option.

Example: Eviplera is a branded tablet containing 3 antiretroviral drugs (Rilpivirine, tenofovir-disoproxil and emtricitabine); there are generic versions of tenofovir-disoproxil + emtricitabine. Replacing Eviplera (STR) with rilpivirine and tenofovir-disoproxil + emtricitabine means taking 2 pills instead of 1 but the active drugs are identical, and at much lower cost.

Avoiding Waste

It is also important we ensure we do not waste prescribed medication. **Medicines waste costs NHS GGC £100,000 every day and it also has an environmental impact.** Please follow packaging instructions in storing medications and do not request significantly more treatment than you need. Please note that **medicines cannot be reused or recycled once they have been dispensed to you.**

Further Information

If you have any concerns, please discuss this with your doctor, or one of the Pharmacists.

