Prescription Cost Analysis for England 2012
Sources and Glossary of Terms and Codes Used

Background to PCA

1.   Prescription Cost Analysis (PCA) data are based on information obtained from prescriptions sent to NHS Prescription Services, a Division of the NHS Business Services Authority for payment. Currently PCA data cover all prescriptions dispensed in the community, in England, i.e. by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, dispensing doctors, and items personally administered by doctors.

Prescriptions included

2.   Prescriptions written by General Medical Practitioners and Non-medical prescribers (nurses, pharmacists etc.) in England represent the vast majority of prescriptions included. Prescriptions written by dentists and hospital doctors are also included provided that they were dispensed in the community. Also included are prescriptions written in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man but dispensed in England. Prescriptions written in England but dispensed outside England are not included. The data do not cover items dispensed in hospital or on private prescriptions.

Definitions

3.   Therapeutic classification

PCA data are based on the therapeutic groupings used in the British National Formulary. The classification in this report is based on the September 2011 BNF (edition 62).

NHS Prescription Services have created pseudo BNF chapters for items not included in BNF chapters 1 to 15. The majority of such items are dressings and appliances, which have been classified into four pseudo BNF chapters (20 to 23). NHS Prescription Services have produced a booklet on BNF classifications and the pseudo classifications used. This BNF Classification booklet is available on the internet at:

http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/PrescriptionServices/3197.aspx

4.   Drug name

Medicines are shown by individual preparation name, which may be proprietary or generic, followed by form and strength. The names used are often presented in an abbreviated form.

5.   Items dispensed

A prescription item refers to a single item prescribed by a doctor (or dentist/nurse/et al.) on a **prescription form**. If a prescription form includes three medicines it is counted as three prescription items.

6.   Net Ingredient Cost (NIC)

NIC refers to the cost of the drug before discounts and does not include any dispensing costs or fees. It does not include any adjustment for income obtained where a prescription charge is paid at the time the prescription is dispensed or where the patient has purchased a pre-payment certificate.

7.   Quantity (QTY)

The quantity of a drug dispensed is measured in units depending on the formulation of the product, see standard quantity unit below. Quantities are not added together across preparations because of different strengths and formulations.

8.   Standard quantity unit (SQU)

This code indicates the form of the drug and the units in which quantity is measured:

Code 1 -   a unit (e.g. one tablet, capsule, pack, aerosol etc)

Code 3 -   millilitres

Code 6 -   grammes

Code 0 -   individually formulated (unit varies)

9.   NIC per Item, NIC per QTY and QTY per Item

These are calculated averages using items, NIC and QTY

10.   Class of preparation (Prep Class)

Generic prescribing is encouraged and many drugs are now prescribed generically even when they are not available in generic form (principally because the branded product is still in patent). Within the PCA system prescriptions for drugs are classified in four ways:

Class 1 -   Drugs prescribed **and** available generically

Class 2 -   Drugs prescribed generically but only available as a proprietary product

Class 3 -   Drugs prescribed and dispensed by proprietary brand name

Class 4 -   Dressings and appliances

11. Treatment of prescription items written generically

The information in this volume and particularly the allocation of classes 1-3 to drugs by NHS Prescription Services reflect the rules for reimbursement.

Where a prescriber has specified the generic form of the drug and the pharmacist has been reimbursed at the generic price, the data for the drug dispensed will be recorded against the class 1 (generic) form of the drug in PCA. Where a generic is not available and hence a pharmacist has been reimbursed at proprietary prices for dispensing the proprietary form, the data will be defined as class 2 and recorded in PCA against the class 3 (proprietary) form of the drug.

Where a drug is defined as class 2, the prescription items, NIC, etc for it are allocated across the items for all equivalent proprietaries. This is done pro rata on the basis of the number of proprietary prescription items dispensed. The column headed "Of which Class 2" (Owc2) in the tables gives the number of prescription items resulting from this apportionment. There are a small number of preparations that are not linked to equivalent proprietaries that appear separately with a class of 2.

There are a small number of preparations which have a figure for net ingredient cost and for quantity but no figure for the number of items dispensed. These preparations (class 2 definition) will have been processed in small batches so it is unlikely that an equivalent proprietary drug will have been processed at the same time. A pro rata allocation, described in the above paragraph, would not have been possible in these cases so the item will have been allocated to the first equivalent proprietary listed but the net ingredient cost and quantity will have been allocated equally to all the equivalent proprietaries listed. As a result of this, the remaining equivalent proprietaries on the list will have a zero figure for items dispensed but a figure (allocated) for net ingredient cost and for quantity.

Part VIII of the Drug Tariff, published by The Stationery Office and available from the Stationery Office Bookshops, lists the basis for reimbursement for most commonly prescribed generic drugs which are (in most cases) available generically.

In some cases, although a generic is available and the pharmacist has been reimbursed at the Drug Tariff price, the pharmacist may have chosen to dispense the equivalent proprietary product. This will, none the less, be recorded against the class 1 form of the drug.

12. How to find the drug you are looking for in this book

The drugs listed in this book are grouped by chemical entity within the BNF category or categories they belong to. If you don't know which BNF category a drug falls into this can be found from index at the back of the book which lists alphabetically all proprietary and generic names for drugs in BNF chapters 1 to 15.

Example: see Table below (example data)

Drug name	BNF Chemical name	Prep. class	SQU	Items (1000s)	Owc2	Nic (£1000s)	Qty (1000s)	Nic/Item (£)	Nic/Qty (£)	Qty/Item
Lloyds_Cholesterol Lowering Tab 10mg	Simvastatin	3	1	0.001	0	0.003	0.084	2.85	0.03	84.00
Simvastatin_Liq Spec 25mg/5ml	Simvastatin	1	3	0.041	0	8.415	9.545	205.25	0.88	232.80
Simvastatin_Liq Spec 40mg/5ml	Simvastatin	1	3	8.831	0	2279.464	1367.499	258.12	1.67	154.85
Simvastatin_Oral Susp 40mg/5ml S/F	Simvastatin	1	3	3.605	0	550.540	542.355	152.72	1.02	150.45
Simvastatin_Oral Susp 20mg/5ml S/F	Simvastatin	1	3	3.413	0	459.440	692.125	134.61	0.66	202.79
Simvastatin_Tab 80mg	Simvastatin	1	1	503.217	0	1735.051	17364.188	3.45	0.10	34.51
Simvastatin_Liq Spec 20mg/5ml	Simvastatin	1	3	10.906	0	2610.140	2309.666	239.33	1.13	211.78
Simvador_Tab 20mg	Simvastatin	3	1	176.266	0	232.919	6704.73	1.32	0.03	38.04
Simvastatin_Tab 10mg	Simvastatin	1	1	2580.588	0	3255.460	92535.696	1.26	0.04	35.86
Simvador_Tab 10mg	Simvastatin	3	1	52.592	0	62.634	1969.273	1.19	0.03	37.44
Zocor_Tab 20mg	Simvastatin	3	1	8.155	0	358.112	337.732	43.91	1.06	41.41
Zocor Heart-Pro_Tab 10mg	Simvastatin	3	1	0.014	0	0.097	0.56	6.93	0.17	40.00
Zocor_Tab 40mg	Simvastatin	3	1	10.016	0	400.024	377.255	39.94	1.06	37.67
Zocor_Tab 80mg	Simvastatin	3	1	0.777	0	30.506	28.77	39.26	1.06	37.03
Simvastatin_Tab 20mg	Simvastatin	1	1	10623.764	0	14781.120	383160.881	1.39	0.04	36.07
Simvastatin_Tab 40mg	Simvastatin	1	1	25030.474	0	46096.882	882543.474	1.84	0.05	35.26
Simvador_Tab 40mg	Simvastatin	3	1	531.034	0	924.476	19570.503	1.74	0.05	36.85
Simvastatin_Liq Spec 10mg/5ml	Simvastatin	1	3	0.012	0	2.849	2.68	237.39	1.06	223.33
Simvador_Tab 80mg	Simvastatin	3	1	2.541	0	8.117	88.466	3.19	0.09	34.82
Zocor_Tab 10mg	Simvastatin	3	1	4.898	0	129.505	201.116	26.44	0.64	41.06

13.   You may require data on all Simvastatin preparations:

Pdf version

- Look up Simvastatin in the index – it falls into BNF Section 2.12 (Lipid-Regulating Drugs).
- Find the pages with BNF: 2.12.0.0 in the bottom right-hand corner. Within these pages chemical entities are listed alphabetically.

Spreadsheet version

- Go to the 'Individual Preparations' worksheet at the end of the workbook.

- Sort the worksheet by Column B (BNF Chemical Name) and find Simvastatin in that column.

Both versions

- There were 20 different preparations dispensed for Simvastatin in this BNF category.
- Ten of these preparations were generic (Prep Class 1) and ten were proprietary (Prep Class 3).
- Simvastatin came out of patent in May 2003, so from this date the generic form became available.
- 8,155 items of Zocor Tab 20mg (Prep Class 3) were dispensed, of which 0 items were prescribed generically (Owc2). This provided 337,732 tablets of the drug (Qty) at an average cost of £1.06 per tablet (Nic per Qty). The average cost per item was £43.91(Nic per item) and the average number of tablets per item was 41.41 (Qty per item).
- 10,623,764 items of Simvastatin_Tab 20mg (the Prep Class 1 equivalent) were dispensed, providing 383,160,881 tablets at an average cost of 4 pence per tablet. The average cost per item was £1.39 and the average number of tablets per item was 36.07.

Notes

14. The number of prescription items dispensed for individual preparations, dressings or appliances is rounded to the nearest 100 in the pdf version. There are a very large number of preparations/dressings/appliances where less than 50 items were dispensed in 2012 and so these will appear as zeros. While accounting for nearly 40% of the total number of preparations dispensed, such preparations covered just 0.01% of the total items dispensed. In order, therefore, to keep the PDF file to a manageable size, such preparations have been excluded, although their figures are included in all total figures such as chemical entity and BNF groupings.

15. NHS Prescription Services have stated that due to the complex and manual processes involved there may be inaccuracies in capturing prescription information which are then reflected in the data. Internal quality assurance processes exist and currently the prescription processing activity is internally audited to 97.5 per cent accuracy (i.e. at least 97.5 per cent of prescriptions are recorded accurately).

   Drug presentations which have been dispensed less than 50 times are included in the spreadsheet version of this publication. Preparations where the number of items dispensed is small are more likely to be significantly affected by any processing errors.

Editorial Information

16.   Further details about PCA data can be obtained from:

        Health and Social Care Information Centre,
        1, Trevelyan Square,
        Boar Lane,
        Leeds LS1 6AE
        Telephone: 0845 300 6016
        Email: enquiries@hscic.gov.uk

Please let us know at this address if you have any comments on this publication.

The Health and Social Care Information Centre (HSCIC) was previously known as "The NHS Information Centre (The NHS IC)"

17.   Annual statistical bulletins which summarise data relating to prescriptions dispensed in the year and highlight some of the trends over the past 10 years are available from the address in paragraph 16. The 2012 bulletin is due to be published on the Internet in July 2013 from www.hscic.gov.uk

18.   Publications (including bulletins) from 1998 to 2004 are available on the Internet at:

        http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk

        Publications (including bulletins) from 2005 onwards are available on the Internet at:

        www.hscic.gov.uk