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Kingston Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust



Using unlicensed medications

Patient information leaflet

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What is the difference between licensed and unlicensed medicines?

A **licensed** medicine is one that is covered by its marketing license in the UK. It is obtained from a government organisation called the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency). The license states which medical conditions the medication can be used for, the ages of patients it can be used for, how much to give and how to give it.

An **unlicensed** medication is one that does not have a license for a particular condition, or that does not have a license at all in the UK. This also includes the '**off label**' use of some medications. '**Off label**' means the medicine is being used in a way that is different to that described in the license.

For example:

- Using the medicine for a different illness as stated in the license.
Usually occurs because the drug company has not extended the license to include certain conditions.
- Using a medicine in an age group outside the licensed range (children, elderly)

Why am I being offered an unlicensed medication?

This is because there is no suitable licensed medication that will be helpful for your eye condition. The use of unlicensed and off-label medication is not unusual in medicine in general.

In ophthalmology, several conditions do not have a licensed medicine and the doctor in the interest of treating their patients and saving their sight offer them a medication that is not licensed to treat his condition. This is in accordance with the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and the General Medical Council guidance.

How do I know that an unlicensed medicine is safe and will work?

Your doctor will have considered all the other possible options as well as the available medical evidence for the medication before offering it to you.

How will I know that a medicine is not licensed?

Your doctor will tell you and explain the reasons why they have decided to offer you this treatment.

What if I don't want to take an unlicensed medicine?

Talk to your doctor regarding your concerns, as they may be able to address any worries you may have, and also give you more information about the medicine.

Contact details

Royal Eye Unit

Mon-Fri 8.30am to 5pm

0208 934 6404

Moorfields at St Georges' Hospital (Duke Elder Ward)

Mon-Fri 5pm to 8.30am, weekends and Bank Holidays

020 8672 1255 ext 2064/0638