Medicines Optimisation Position Statement

Position Statement	**Prescribing medicinal products using the generic name**
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NHS Frimley recommends that medicines should be generally prescribed generically in line with the British National Formulary (BNF) Guidance on Prescribing and Specialist Pharmacy Service (SPS) recommendations. There are some exceptions listed below.

Background

The NHS has an obligation to meet national priorities through effective use of available resources. NHS Frimley gives the highest priority to treatments that are known to be most cost effective at improving health, and a low priority to treatments where the cost is high and evidence for health improvement is low.

New medicinal products are covered by a period of intellectual property protection defined by a patent. This period allows the holder to recoup research and development costs and maintain a profit margin.

Once the patent has expired then other companies may manufacture and supply the same product. To do so they must prove that the product supplied contains the same active ingredients and that the same amount is absorbed by an individual taking that medicinal product. Manufacturing must meet the same standard of quality and safety as defined and monitored by the Medicines & Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. This ensures that these competitor products are equivalent and of the highest quality.

Patients and clinicians can be assured that the same effect will result from prescribing these products.

The competitor products may be available under the “generic name” of the medicinal product or, alternatively, may be marketed under their own brand name. These competitors can be up to 90% lower cost to the NHS for an equivalent product. This results in millions of pounds being released to spend on healthcare services for local people.

Biosimilar products
In November 2022, the MHRA updated its guidance on the licensing of biosimilar products. Their guidance states:

"Once authorised, a biosimilar product is considered to be interchangeable with their reference product (RP), which means a prescriber can choose the biosimilar medicine over the RP (or vice versa) and expect to achieve the same therapeutic effect. Likewise, a biosimilar product is considered to be interchangeable with another biosimilar to the same RP.

As a result of interchangeability, switching patients from one product to another (RP or biosimilar) has become clinical practice. The decision rests with the prescriber in consultation with the patient, in line with the principles of shared decision making; both need to be aware of the brand name of the product received.

All biological medicines, including biosimilars, should be prescribed by brand name."

Therefore, biosimilar medicines are considered interchangeable with the original product and changing between them can occur. However, prescribing should be by brand name.

Recommendation
Prescribing medicines by generic name is generally preferred for the following reasons:

- Generic prescribing offers value for public money
- Generic prescribing reduces the risk of errors as each drug has only one generic name but can have several brand names
- Generic prescribing enables quicker medicines supply because a pharmacy can source and supply any suitable generic product rather than having to source a specific brand.

Generic prescribing is recommended as the default approach except in the following circumstances:
- Biosimilar products
- When bioavailability differs between brands e.g., ciclosporin, lithium, carbamazepine for epilepsy.
- When modified release formulations have different release profiles e.g. methylphenidate
- When there are different administration techniques for different devices e.g. adrenaline autoinjectors, inhalers, insulin injection devices
- Multi-ingredient preparations where there is a risk of confusion between products with similar constituents e.g. combined oral contraceptives.

References:
https://www.sps.nhs.uk/articles/prescribing-by-generic-or-brand-name-in-primary-care/
https://bnf.nice.org.uk/guidance/guidance-on-prescribing.html
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-the-licensing-of-biosimilar-products/guidance-on-the-licensing-of-biosimilar-products