

Prescribing for Patients Travelling Abroad for Extended Periods

Guidance

- By law, the NHS ceases to have responsibility for the medical care of patients when they leave the UK. Eligibility to receive free medical treatment relates to whether a person is “ordinarily resident” in the UK. People travelling within Europe are advised to carry an authorised European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) at all times and this gives entitlement to reduced cost (and sometimes free) medical treatment
- Patients should be advised to check specific entitlements prior to travel

Duration of Prescription

- For patients who will be out of the country for less than 3 months, it is reasonable to provide sufficient medicines for an existing condition (i.e. asthma, diabetes)
- For patients leaving the country for more than 3 months, they should be advised to register with a local doctor for their continuing medical needs. It is reasonable for GPs to provide sufficient medication to give patients time to do this

Prescribing on the NHS

- Doctors should not provide an NHS script for conditions that may possibly arise whilst the patient is away, such as traveller’s diarrhoea. Persons who have left the UK, or who are intending to leave the UK, for more than 3 months are not normally allowed to continue to be registered with a practice
- The NHS accepts responsibility for supplying ongoing medication for temporary periods abroad of up to 3 months. If a person is going to be abroad for more than three months then all that the patient is entitled to at NHS expense is a sufficient supply of his/her regular medication in order to get to their destination, where they should then find an alternative supply of that medication
- Prescribing long-term for a patient who will not be in contact with the GP could put the doctor at risk of litigation in the event of a medical problem. GPs retain clinical responsibility as long as they are prescribing treatment for their patients. Patients could raise a legal case against their doctor if they were inadequately monitored and experienced side effects of treatment whilst abroad
- Some patients offer to pay for an extended private prescription. However, the GP still retains medico-legal responsibility for this prescription. In addition, under the Terms of Service, a GP may not charge for a private prescription if a patient is registered on his or her NHS list and that treatment would normally be provided under GMS
- GPs should always seek specific advice from their medical defence organisation if they believe there is a significant medico-legal risk. If there are further questions the doctor’s medical defence organisation or the Local Medical Committee should be contacted for advice

Patient Information

- Patients should be advised to access the NHS Choices website www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad which has a lot of information about travelling and moving abroad with regards to healthcare

Further Information

- Wessex LMC website <https://www.wessexlmcs.com/patientstravellingabroadprescriptionsadvice>