

# RUBEFACIENTS

## Medicines Management Team Advisory Summary

*Rubefacients have limited clinical value. They are suitable for self-care and prescribers should advise patients to purchase OTC if they wish to use them*

### Introduction

Rubefacients are used for the treatment of soft-tissue disorders and pain relief. They act by counter-irritation of the skin relieving superficial and deep-seated pain; however available evidence does not support the use of topical rubefacients in musculoskeletal pain. Brands include Tiger Balm<sup>®</sup>, Hirudoid<sup>®</sup>, Movelat<sup>®</sup> and many others.

### Formulary Status

3Ts	BCAP	ICID
Not-recommended	Transvasin <sup>®</sup> ONLY to aid taking blood for capillary blood gas sampling	Non-formulary

### Recommended Actions

- All patients prescribed rubefacients should have their therapy reviewed.
- Discontinue the prescribing of rubefacients on FP10.
- Consider recommending or prescribing an effective alternative treatment if appropriate, e.g. Topical NSAID such as Ibuprofen gel (prescribed as Fenbid).
- If these patients still wish to use a rubefacient, they can be purchased as self-care over-the-counter (OTC) with the support of the community pharmacist.
- Do not initiate new prescriptions for rubefacients.

### Benefits to patients

- Patients should be explained that using rubefacients (Deep Heat, Tiger Balm...) is unlikely to help relieve their musculoskeletal pain and therefore they will not be prescribed on FP10.
- No evidence supports the use of OTC topical preparations for chilblains.
- A reduction in the prescribing of rubefacients will release cost savings for the NHS which could be invested in improving local healthcare services for patients.

### Cost Impact in Wiltshire

- There are many rubefacients on the market which vary in composition and cost. The most prevalent is Movelat<sup>®</sup>.
- Over **£24,000** spent on rubefacients in 2016/17 in Wiltshire.

### References

1. PrescQipp Bulletin 114 Oct 2015 Rubefacients available from <https://www.prescquipp.info/component/jdownloads/send/224-rubefacients-drop-list/2334-bulletin-114-rubefacients>
2. NICE CG 117 Osteoarthritis available from <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg177/chapter/1-Recommendations#pharmacological-management>
3. NICE Do Not Do available from <https://www.nice.org.uk/donotdo/rubefacients-are-not-recommended-for-the-treatment-of-osteoarthritis>