Royal College of General Practitioners Scotland (RCGP SCOTLAND)

Legislative Consent Memorandum (LCM) on the Health Service Medical Supplies (Costs) Bill

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the academic organisation in the UK for general practitioners. Its aim is to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and act as the ‘voice’ of general practitioners on education, training and issues around standards of care for patients.

The College in Scotland came into existence in 1953 (one year after the UK College), when a Scottish Council was created to take forward the College’s interests within the Scottish Health Service. We currently represent over 5100 GP members and Associates in Training throughout Scotland. In addition to a base in Edinburgh, the College in Scotland is represented through five regional faculty offices in Edinburgh, Aberdeen, Inverness, Dundee and Glasgow.

RCGP Scotland generally supports the principles of transparency in regards to health service medicines. We would agree in line with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society that an aim to ensure that prices of medicines are reasonable and proportionate is to be welcomed. We support the approach by Scottish Government to align with that of the Westminster Government. We would also welcome a process that brings consistency across Scotland.

In considering the implications of the LCM, we invited the perspective of one of our Members who is a dispensing GP. With his understanding that the proposed legislative amendments to the Bill aim to tighten up the mismatch between two schemes intended to regulate the prices of NHS branded medicines, one system being voluntary and the other statutory; he noted that concerns have arisen around dramatic costs of some single sourced unbranded generic medications - the costs of multi sourced generics being controlled by competition and an open market.

He noted that his practice buys their medication from a wholesaler and is reimbursed the tariff price once that medicine has been prescribed. He stated: “It does not make good business sense to tie up significant amounts of business capital in expensive ‘perishable’ products, therefore we police the price hikes alluded to by, where possible, amending our prescribing.” He noted that colleagues within the community pharmacies have a much larger turnover and employ buyers to negotiate with manufacturers regarding purchase costs.

He therefore feels that an amendment to the bill is more likely to be of benefit to the NHS in the future as more and more medications come off patent, and also considers that the difficulties with Pregabalin/lyrica might not have arisen had this amendment been in place (Pregabalin has now come off patent and can be bought as Lecaent but this product is not licensed for neuropathic pain. Pfizer retain the patent for neuropathic pain thus the expensive branded version - Lyrica- has to be prescribed for this purpose.

RCGP Scotland considers that within the current climate of a resource deficit in general practice, all processes to minimise expenditure on medicines should be welcomed.