

Increasing serial prescribing at a general practice in Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership

Background

Serial prescriptions allow patients to receive regular supplies of their medication from a community pharmacy for up to 56 weeks, without needing to reorder each time. Items are dispensed in instalments (typically every 8 weeks), with each collection electronically recorded in the general practice system. This approach can reduce over-ordering, support adherence monitoring and offer a more convenient, less burdensome option for patients on stable medication regimens.

One practice in Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership selected serial prescribing as the focus of their local quality improvement (QI) project.

Aim

To increase the proportion of repeat prescriptions being issued as serial prescriptions by 50%, from a baseline of 6%, by March 2025.

Approach

The QI project was jointly led by a general practitioner (GP) and a pharmacy technician, recognising that a multidisciplinary team (MDT) approach would increase likelihood of success. The team focused on:

1. Building practice team knowledge

- Developed role-specific and practice-wide protocols to support a consistent approach.
- Delivered targeted training sessions for GPs and administrative staff.
- Introduced a serial prescription learning log. Issues logged included inappropriate items on serial prescriptions, patient queries and repeat requests from community pharmacy.

2. Collaboration with community pharmacy

- Updated the shared care agreement between the GP practice and a community pharmacy to clarify the responsibilities of the community pharmacy and the practice.
- Established two-way training between community pharmacy and practice staff to ensure shared understanding and responsibilities.

3. The right person doing the right task

- The Pharmacy Support Worker (PSW) assisted the pharmacy technician in identifying patients suitable for serial prescribing. Using the Scottish Therapeutic Index and aligning with birth month reviews, the PSW applied inclusion and exclusion criteria and checked for recent patient reviews. The initial focus was on patients prescribed 1–3 items. Patients deemed suitable were then confirmed by the practice pharmacist.
- The practice joined the pharmacotherapy hub in January 2025, which reduced the practice team's time spent on medicines reconciliation and allowed the pharmacy technician more time to focus on completing Treatment Summary Reports (TSRs).

Impact

- The proportion of repeat prescriptions issued as serials at the GP practice increased from 6% in April 2024 to 9% in March 2025. This upward trend has continued, reaching 10% by June 2025, meeting their initial improvement target.
- A staff survey showed an increase in confidence in handling serial prescriptions.
- The administrative team valued pharmacy support with patient questions about serial prescriptions and TSR related queries.

Next steps

- Continue with new ways of collaborative MDT working and maintain the learning log,
- further increase the number of suitable patients on serial prescriptions,
- develop frequently asked questions to support staff and patients, and
- continue to engage with community pharmacy stakeholders.

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