

# Shortage of Capsaicin Cream (Zacin and Axsain)

**Date:** 13<sup>th</sup> December 2019

## Description of product affected

- Axsain contains 0.075% capsaicin and is licensed for the symptomatic relief of neuralgia associated with and following Herpes Zoster infections (post-herpetic neuralgia) after open skin lesions have healed, and also for the symptomatic management of painful diabetic peripheral polyneuropathy.<sup>1</sup>
- Zacin contains 0.025% capsaicin and is licensed for the symptomatic relief of pain associated with osteoarthritis.<sup>2</sup> Capsaicin 0.025% cream is currently NON-FORMULARY and not recommended for prescribing in primary or secondary care within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for its licensed indication. However, this position is currently under review by the Medicines Optimisation Team.

## Background

- Teva, the sole supplier of these two products, is out of stock until at least December 2019.
- At present it seems possible to **import supplies of unlicensed capsaicin cream** whilst there is no stock available in the UK.

## Alternative agents and management options

- Review continuing need for capsaicin, if treatment is still required, consider changing to alternative formulary treatment. Choice of an alternative agent will depend on what patients have already tried, and reasons for being on a topical as opposed to an oral agent.
- If licensed options are not considered appropriate, it would seem advisable to maintain patients on capsaicin using imported supplies if necessary, which would need to be treated as an unlicensed medicine in line with local clinical governance procedures.

## Neuropathic pain

- In the non-specialist settings, oral therapies such as amitriptyline, duloxetine or gabapentin are recommended as initial treatment for neuropathic pain; if the initial treatment is not effective or is not tolerated, one of the remaining three drugs should be offered, and switching again if the second and third drugs tried are also not effective or not tolerated.
- NICE guidance supports use of capsaicin cream as an option for people with localised neuropathic pain who wish to avoid, or who cannot tolerate, oral treatments.<sup>3</sup>

- If patients are unwilling to try/retry oral agents then options are limited to over the counter products (if not already tried) containing counter irritants (e.g. menthol, camphor), however there is limited evidence to support use. Advice to be sought from the community pharmacist on choice of product if the patient wishes to consider this option
- Please see netFormulary for neuropathic pain treatment options recommended in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough:  
<http://www.cambridgeshireandpeterboroughformulary.nhs.uk/chaptersSubDetails.asp?FormularySectionID=4&SubSectionRef=04.07.03&SubSectionID=A100&drugmatch=3757#3757>

### **Osteoarthritis**

- In NICE guidance, topical capsaicin 0.025% is considered a treatment option for knee or hand osteoarthritis. This is currently NON-FORMULARY and not recommended for prescribing in primary or secondary care within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough for its licensed indication. However, this position is currently under review by the Medicines Optimisation Team.
- Paracetamol and/or topical NSAIDs are the usual first line treatments
- Other systemic treatment options, if the first line options are insufficient for pain relief, include oral NSAIDs or COX-2 inhibitor, the choice of which will depend on factors such as co-morbidities and concomitant medication.
- NICE recommends against using rubefacients, these are NON-FORMULARY and not recommended for prescribing in primary or secondary care within Cambridgeshire and Peterborough but may be purchased over the counter upon the advice of a community pharmacist if patients wish to consider this option.

### **Action for GP practices:**

- Practices should liaise with pharmacies directly to ascertain their stock levels as pharmacies use a range of different wholesalers.
- If stock is not available, review choice of medication and consider other licensed alternatives where clinically appropriate
- **Where supplies are unavailable and an alternative licensed treatment is not clinically suitable, ordering import products may take much longer than the normal ordering process,** the prescription should be written in a time frame to allow the pharmacy to order the stock from the importing company before the patient runs out of medication.

### **Action for Pharmacies:**

- Support by checking your current stock levels of these products and informing your local practices.
- Support by checking your pharmacy is able to order the unlicensed capsaicin preparation for when an order needs to be placed and keep upto date with the estimated delivery timescales.
- Support prescribers in counselling patients regarding any change to their medication, including any changes in packaging or appearance of the cream, which may be unusual to a patient.

## References

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5. Grunenthal Ltd. Versatis 700mg Medicated Plaster. SPC, date of revision of the text, 25 May 2018: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/290/smpc>
6. NHS England and NHS Improvement. Items which should not routinely be prescribed in primary care: Guidance for CCGs, Version 2, June 2019: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/items-which-should-not-routinely-be-prescribed-in-primary-care-v2.1.pdf>
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9. RCGP. Safer Prescribing in Prisons 2019: <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/policy/rcgp-policy-areas/prison-medicine.aspx>

### Original document prepared by:

Yuet Wan, London and South East Regional Medicines Information, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, 30 August 2019; revised 09 September 2019; email: [medicinesinformation@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:medicinesinformation@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Document modified by and for all correspondence please contact:

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Clinical Commissioning Group, Medicines Optimisation Team 13 December 2019; email: [CAPCCG.prescribingpartnership@nhs.net](mailto:CAPCCG.prescribingpartnership@nhs.net)

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