Monthly Ordering to Reduce Care Home Medication Waste

Before you request prescriptions for the coming month, check the current stock levels of medication, especially items which are not supplied in individually packed monitored dosage systems (MDS). There should not usually be more than one month’s supply available in the home for any resident. Sometimes quantities in excess of one month’s supply may be prescribed, or usage may change. Some residents may need a medication review to revise items/quantities prescribed in the future. To reduce wastage, some items may safely be retained for use: see below.

- Medicines must be disposed of a set length of time after opening, only if stated on the container, or at the manufacturer’s expiry date, whichever comes first: see details overleaf.
- Medicines should generally be stored below 25˚C, unless the manufacturer directs otherwise. The temperature of all medicines storage areas should be monitored, and action taken if the temperature exceeds 25˚C.
- For items requiring refrigerated storage, the temperature of the fridge should be monitored, and action taken if this falls outside the 2-8˚C range. Only items requiring refrigerated storage should be stored in a fridge.
- The date of opening should be marked on containers when they are opened.
- Medicines may be retained for use, as long as they are still being prescribed, and they are still on the MAR charts: details overleaf. Ask your pharmacy to retain these on the MAR chart if you do not re-order them each month.
- Medication that is taken when required (PRN) should be ordered boxed rather than in an MDS. If tablets are regularly being returned for disposal, ask the GP to prescribe smaller quantities, and ask the pharmacy to supply them boxed.
- Oral liquids, can be retained for use, if they are marked with the date of opening, and are still being prescribed, and are retained on the MAR chart, and only used for a maximum of 6 months after opening, unless a shorter date is on the container. E.g. Mrs X takes a variable dose of lactulose, according to her needs, and is prescribed 500ml a month. If she has a bottle with 200ml left in it, do not return this for disposal. If it has been marked with the date of opening, it may be retained for use up to 6 months from this date. The quantity on the prescription could be reduced in the future.
- If creams are being regularly disposed of at the end of each month, ask for the quantity prescribed to be reduced, or review whether it is still needed.
- Any medicines retained for use in the following month(s) must be recorded in the ‘carried forward’ section of the residents’ MAR charts, estimating the amount of any liquids kept.

References:

3. New guidance on use of eye preparations; Summary. Pharmaceutical Journal Vol 267 No 7163 p307, 1 September 2001
7. Coventry and Warwickshire APC Guidance for Expiry Dates For use in Care homes September 2011
# In-Use Shelf-Lives in Care Homes

For All Medication: Check Manufacturer’s Expiry Date on the product first.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Medication</th>
<th>Unopened: stored following manufacturer’s guidance</th>
<th>Once opened</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tablets &amp; capsules in original blister strips with expiry date</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>Medicines kept for use in next month should be recorded in the ‘carried forward’ section of the MAR chart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablets &amp; capsules packed in Monitored Dosage System (MDS)</td>
<td>8 weeks *</td>
<td>8 weeks *</td>
<td>PRN (when required) medication, wherever possible, should be used from the manufacturer’s original pack.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tablets, capsules and liquids dispensed in medicine bottles</td>
<td>Seek Community Pharmacy advice. Dependent on stability of product</td>
<td>Seek Community Pharmacy advice. Dependent on stability of product</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Liquids in original container.</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>6 months after opening, unless manufacturer advises sooner **</td>
<td>Write the DATE when opened on the dispensing label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External liquids</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>Write the DATE when opened on the dispensing label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creams/Ointments</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>Tubs/pots: 1 month</td>
<td>All creams should be for named residents. Creams in pots/tubs should be discarded if contaminated or if the lid has been left off for any indeterminate period. Write the DATE when opened on the dispensing label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye drops/ointment, Ear drops, Nose drops</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>28 days</td>
<td>It is not normal practice to have one bottle of eye drops for each eye in Care/Nursing Homes, except when there is an open infection. Write the DATE when opened on the dispensing label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal spray</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>3 months unless patient information leaflet recommends sooner</td>
<td>Write the DATE when opened on the dispensing label</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inhalers /Glyceryl trinitrate sprays</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date</td>
<td>If inhalers are used on a PRN (when required) basis, and are still prescribed: retain for on-going use, leave on MAR chart. Only re-order if needed. Ensure product in date for on-going use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insulins</td>
<td>Manufacturer’s expiry date if stored in the fridge</td>
<td>When in use can be kept out of the fridge for 1 month</td>
<td>One pen/cartridge will often be sufficient per month. Ask the G.P to prescribe the nearest number of pens/cartridges</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
There is no evidence to support the 8 week expiry date, but this has become common practice. Advice is that light-sensitive or hygroscopic medicines (medicines capable of easily absorbing moisture, e.g. from the air) should not be re-packed into MDS systems. Manufacturers of individual products can be contacted for specific advice.

Some medicines have a shorter shelf life once opened. Examples include:

- Asasantin Retard capsules 6 weeks
- Persantin Retard capsules 6 weeks
- Glyceryl trinitrate tablets 8 weeks
- Oramorph 10mg/5ml Oral Solution 3 months
- Oramorph Concentrated 20mg/ml Oral Solution 4 months
- Risperdal 1mg/ml Oral Solution 3 months
- Ranitidine 150mg/10ml oral solution 1 month

This list is not exhaustive: always check the manufacturer’s label. Many specially manufactured items have short expiry dates.