Prescribing Commissioning Policy

Dental Pain and Infections

NHS Eastern Cheshire CCG, NHS South Cheshire CCG and NHS Vale Royal CCG have agreed a policy to support national recommendations for treatment of dental pain and infections. Patients should seek a dental appointment if toothache persists for more than one or two days, and take painkillers such as paracetamol or ibuprofen until they see the dentist. GPs are advised that dental abscesses must be treated by dentists, and that antibiotic prescribing is not routinely recommended.

Medical assessment may be appropriate where it appears that there is either systemic involvement, or where the pain may be unrelated to a dental problem.

Background

Patients may present to general practice requesting treatment for dental pain. Patients should be advised that toothache requires assessment and treatment by a dentist, and that GPs can only offer advice on using appropriate painkillers while awaiting a dental appointment.

However, a medical assessment would be appropriate where dental pain is accompanied by symptoms that suggest either a systemic problem or a localised non-dental problem and this would be the NHS 111 disposition. For example, a patient with significant facial swelling going up to the eye may be referred for a medical assessment. Other scenarios might be where the patient has taken up to or exceeded the maximum recommended dosage of analgesia, or where there is significant bleeding. Practice appointment systems may need to be modified to accommodate patients who have been triaged by NHS 111 as needing a medical review.

Summary of Prescribing Principles

The following principles are adapted from NHS Choices advice to patients.

- Patients should be advised to make a dental appointment for:
  - Toothache that has lasted more than 2 days
  - Toothache that is not relieved by analgesia
  - Toothache associated with a high temperature, pain when biting, red gums, or a bad taste in the mouth
  - Toothache associated with swelling in the cheek or jaw
- Patients can find dentists using NHS Choices or CCG websites, or by phoning NHS 111. Dentists may not be available out of hours and some patients may require assessment at A&E.
- Patients can be advised to attend A&E in the following circumstances:
  - There is swelling around the eye or in the neck
  - Swelling in the mouth/neck is making it difficult for the patient to breathe, swallow or speak.
- Doctors may recommend painkillers while patients await dental care, but can’t offer definitive treatment for dental conditions.
• Patients can purchase painkillers such as paracetamol and ibuprofen from community pharmacies while awaiting dental treatment. Patients may also be advised to consider other measures to relieve discomfort while awaiting dental treatment, such as eating soft foods, rinsing with a salt water mouthwash and using dental gel.
• Patients should be advised that dental abscesses won’t get better on their own, and require treatment by a dentist.
• Antibiotics are not routinely used to treat dental abscesses, and therefore it is not recommended that GPs prescribe antibiotics while patients await definitive treatment.
• If the dentist deems that antibiotics are appropriate they can prescribe them, and patients should be aware that private dentists will issue private prescriptions.

Preventing toothache / dental pain

Patients should be advised to attend a dentist regularly for advice on dental health and oral hygiene. NICE advises that the interval of dental check-ups should be individualised for each patient.

NHS England has issued guidance to CCGs that toothpaste and mouthwash that can be purchased over-the-counter should not be routinely prescribed by general practice. This guidance has been adopted locally and these items are no longer recommended for most patients.

Prescription-only toothpaste (such as Duraphat 2800ppm and Duraphat 5000ppm) and chlorhexidine-containing mouthwash should usually be prescribed by dentists. Rarely, it may be appropriate to prescribe these items in general practice on the recommendation of a specialist (usually hospital) clinician for an underlying condition (for example following treatment for head and neck cancer).

Summary of Principles for Communication
The policy applies to general practice within NHS South Cheshire CCG, NHS Eastern Cheshire CCG and NHS Vale Royal CCG areas. The Policy will be circulated to Prescribing Leads and Practice Managers, and made available via the website www.centralandeasterncheshireMMT.nhs.uk.

References
NHS Choices website (see http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Toothache/Pages/Introduction.aspx) accessed on 26th April 2018
Dental checks: intervals between oral health reviews (see https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/cg19/chapter/1-Guidance accessed on 26th April 2018


Policy for Conditions for which over the counter items should not routinely be prescribed in primary care http://www.centralandeasterncheshiremmt.nhs.uk/uploads/7255

Initially approved by the Executive Prescribing Committee on 14th October 2015; updated version reviewed and approved by the Area Prescribing Group on 10 July 2018