THE EYE WATERING COSTS OF DRY EYE DROPS

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BACKGROUND

In 2021/22, the total cost to NHS commissioners in England, for the issue of medicines, appliances, and medical devices is estimated to be £17.2 billion. Ophthalmic preparations are amongst the top ten drug categories by spend across primary care and hospitals. Furthermore, we aim to look at our prescribing spend, starting with dry eye products, to look for savings in prescribing expenditure.

METHOD

Every ICS (previously known as CCG) has a prescribing formulary. In the Leicestershire and Rutland ICS, the formulary is known as Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Area Prescribing Committee (LLRAPC) Medicines Formulary (2). The ICS pharmacist pulled data from ePACT Primary Care from 1st April 2021 to 31st March 2022 for all dry eye products written on FP10s dispensed from community pharmacies. The total spend for the financial year of 2021/2022 on dry eye products alone was £ 1,521,215.26.

The ophthalmic pharmacist of University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL) gathered the ePACT2 data of the same dates which would account for FP10s written in the hospital but dispensed in the community pharmacies. The total spend was £ 1,118,884.65.

University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL) has an outpatient pharmacy, Trustmed, which supplies medicines written on hospital prescriptions. It is unknown what the cost of medicines supplied is to the Trust. Therefore, the cost here is not factored into our report today. UHL also has Ophthalmology sites across 6 Alliance hospitals which are not factored into this report too.

The ePACT2 data from primary care and secondary care was analyzed by two consultant ophthalmologists. Initial observations were that generic prescribing is not necessarily cheaper, the unit costs of eye drops were not widely known and that prescribing was not necessarily etiology based.

The majority of prescribing spend were aligned with higher cost ocular lubricant preparations. From the formulary review, cost efficiencies were identified by switching to more cost-effective preparations.

RESULTS

The Top Five Products and Costings for 2021/2022 are as below:

PRIMARY CARE

Hylo-forte 0.2%	£335,469.12
Thealoz Duo eye drops	£182,053.84
Hylo-tear 0.1%	£143,143.38
Simple Eye Ointment	£71,050.05
Hyabak 0.15%	£41,825.93

UHL (LRI)

Hylo-forte 0.2%	£28,449.47
Ikervis 0.1%	£24,409.33
Thealoz Duo eye drops	£19,283.53
Thealoz Duo gel	£7340.15
Hylo night ointment	£4418.91

The Drug Tariff (4) was consulted on prices and quality assessed. Assuming that items 1,2,3 & 5 in Primary care are substituted with ViZhyal 0.2% (£4.10 per bottle) and item 4 substituted with Xailin night gel, total projected savings are calculated to be £491,854.63.

Similarly, for UHL LRI, savings based on product switching of 1,3,4,5 in UHL LRI are projected to be £64,459.43.

Furthermore, the ePACT2 data shows that the prescribing spend for ocular lubricants within primary care (i.e GP Practice) across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland has increased by 7% from 2019/2020 each year up to 2021/2022 in primary care.

Although the data above may be slightly skewed due to Covid-19, this shows that prescribing levels have not returned back to pre-covid-19 levels therefore creating a cost pressure to the system, and this, highlighting the importance of this work.

LLR PRIMARY CARE	SUM OF ACTUAL COST
2019/2020	£1,335,617.03
2020/2021	£1,423,476.69
2021/2022	£1,524,811.55

CONCLUSIONS

As a result, the decision was undertaken by the Ophthalmology team to update the formulary to equivalent but more cost-effective products. A self-care section was introduced to patients and learning resources were drawn up for GPs and prescribers in primary care (3). Further recommendations include collaborative multi-disciplinary review of ophthalmic products.