

Landmark decision to allow Independent Prescribing by physiotherapists – reducing bureaucracy and improving patient care

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On 20 August 2013 the right of physiotherapists in England to prescribe medicines for their patients came into law. This is an important step that has the potential to significantly reduce bureaucracy and improve patient care. This briefing outlines what this change means and the implications for health and social care services and service users.

Introduction

This change in the law was a landmark step, making the UK the first country in the world to give independent prescribing rights to physiotherapists.

Definition of independent prescribing

Independent prescribing is the process by which a practitioner is responsible and accountable for the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of a patient's conditions and for decisions about the clinical management required, including prescribing medication.

How it will work

Experienced physiotherapists who have received approved training will be able to prescribe medicines to their patients. This for the first time puts physiotherapists on a par with other non-medical professionals, like nurses and pharmacists.

Those exercising the new right will mainly be those physiotherapists working in advanced practitioner roles, for example in respiratory care, neurological care, chronic pain and women's health.

Physiotherapists are registered by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). From 2014 physiotherapists will be able to undertake HCPC approved training to become independent prescribers. This training will be rigorous and physiotherapists will be responsible for keeping their skills up to date.

Reaping the benefits

Giving independent prescribing rights to physiotherapists has the potential to unlock resources in health and social care services, streamline patient pathways and improve patient safety and care.

For example, people with long term conditions, and frail older people rely on physiotherapists to support them to manage their health and maintain independence in the

community. This change makes it possible for them to be directly prescribed the treatment they need by the professional expert in charge of their treatment. This simple measure has the potential to cut duplication, bureaucracy and unnecessary visit to GPs and consultants. For patients and service users it means better continuity of care, fewer appointments and less delay.

What the CSP is asking MPs to do

For these benefits to be realised commissioners and providers need to make independent prescribing a reality, factoring this into service redesign.

Currently this step forward only applies to England. The CSP wants to work with members from Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales and the devolved administrations to facilitate the legislative changes to ensure that all people in the UK can benefit equally from the improvements in care this will deliver.

Paul Burstow MP has tabled Early Day Motion 588 on independent prescribing for physiotherapists, which welcomes this measure and recognises the major improvement in care that this will deliver. **The CSP is urging members across the House to support the successful implementation of independent prescribing so that communities in their constituency can reap the benefits.**