



## Palliative Care in the Community: Access to Medicines

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### Introduction

Medicines commonly used in Palliative Care are not always easily accessible to patients in the community setting. In particular unlicensed medicines and non-prescription medicines may pose problems as they are not always paid for by the government medicines schemes and can be costly for the patient or their family members. Where possible, licensed medicines should be prescribed for patients based in the community. The community pharmacist plays an important role in ensuring the timely and cost effective supply of unlicensed medicines in the community but they may experience difficulty or delays when trying to source unlicensed medications. It is advisable to inform the community pharmacist as soon as an unlicensed medicine is prescribed for a patient with palliative care needs. See table 1 for a list of medicines for which accessibility may be a problem.

### HSE Medicine Schemes Overview

Medicines in Ireland are supplied to the patient by the community pharmacy under the following HSE schemes:

- **The Medical Card (also referred to as a GMS card):** A €2.50 prescription charge applies to all prescription medicines dispensed to patients holding a medical card, up to a maximum of €25 per month, per person or family.<sup>1</sup> For persons aged 70 & over, and their dependents, the prescription charge is reduced to €2 per item, up to a maximum of €20.<sup>1</sup>
- **The Drugs Payment Scheme (DPS):** An individual or family in Ireland pays a maximum of €144 each month for approved prescription medicines.<sup>2</sup> Anyone

Palliative Meds Info: Terms and Conditions

The information outlined above is intended for healthcare professionals only. The information outlined above is believed to accurately reflect the medical literature at the time of writing. Healthcare professionals must use their own judgment to determine the accuracy and relevance of the information. See [www.olh.ie](http://www.olh.ie) for full terms and conditions.

ordinarily resident in Ireland can apply to join the scheme, regardless of family, financial circumstances or nationality.<sup>2</sup>

- **The Long Term Illness (LTI) scheme:** A patient can apply to have their medicines supplied under the LTI scheme if they have one of the following illnesses or disabilities including (but not limited to); acute leukaemia, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, diabetes mellitus, diabetes insipidus, intellectual disability, parkinsonism, epilepsy or conditions arising from the use of thalidomide.<sup>3</sup> There is no income requirement or means test. The patient is supplied with a long term illness book. This book allows the patient to get medicines, directly related to the treatment of the illness, free of charge.<sup>3</sup>
- **The Health (Amendment) Act Card (HAA Card):** Patients who contracted Hepatitis C from the administration within Ireland of blood or blood products and have a positive diagnostic test, are entitled to all prescribed drugs free of charge.<sup>4</sup>
- **The High Tech Scheme:** 'High Tech' medicines, e.g. anti-rejection drugs for transplant patients or medicines used in conjunction with chemotherapy or growth hormones. These medications are generally only prescribed or initiated in hospital. The medicines are purchased by the Health Service Executive and supplied through Community Pharmacies. The patient will pay for the 'High Tech' item(s) under the DPS schemes.<sup>5</sup> Patients with a medical card receive 'High Tech' items free-of-charge.<sup>5</sup>
- **Methadone in Palliative Care:** Methadone for 'non-opiate dependent patients' is paid for under the medical card or DPS schemes.

### **How do you know if a medicine is unlicensed?**

An Unlicensed (or Exempt) medicine is a medicinal product, which does not carry either a Product Authorisation (PA) number issued by the Health Products Regulatory Authority (HPRA) or an European Union (EU) authorisation number issued by the European Medicines Evaluation Agency (EMA) (ref Regulation 6, Medicinal Products (Control of Placing on the Market) regulations SI 540 2007). An unlicensed medicine should only be prescribed when an equally safe and effective licensed alternative, in a similar/suitable formulation, is not available. The Health Product Regulatory Authority (HPRA) maintains a list of licensed medicines on their website, available from [www.hpra.ie](http://www.hpra.ie).

### **Why are certain medications not available on the GMS or DPS?**

There are many reasons why a medicine is not available on the GMS or DPS. The manufacturer/agent must submit an application to the Department of Health and Children to have a medicine reimbursed on the GMS or DPS schemes.<sup>5</sup> The medicine must have a current EU Commission Marketing Authorisation (MA) or a Product Authorisation (PA) issued by the Health Products Regulatory Authority, in other words it must be licensed in Ireland.<sup>5</sup> It is mainly unlicensed medicines that are not available on the GMS or DPS. However, there are also some licensed medicines that are not available on the GMS or DPS schemes (see table 1).

### **Certain unlicensed medications are available on the medical card or DPS schemes.**

#### **Why is this?**

There is a list of Exempt Medicinal Products that may be covered under the GMS or DPS. It is advisable to consult with the community pharmacist if an unlicensed medicine is to be prescribed. Unfortunately, some unlicensed medicines used commonly in palliative care are not covered on this list.

### **What is the Essential Non-GMS scheme (previously known as the Hardship Scheme)?**

If a patient with a medical card is prescribed an unlicensed medicine that is not listed on the Exempt Medicinal Products list an application may be made to the Local Health Office to supply the medicine under the Essential Non-GMS scheme. The criteria for the supply of medicines under this scheme are changeable. Therefore, it is important to consult with the patient's community pharmacist. The community pharmacist can make the application to the Local Health Office on behalf of the patient. The procedure for this application may differ between health offices. Since October 2016, an application for a range of medicines, supported by a GP prescription, can be made for patients prescribed opioid medication under the supervision of a Palliative Care Team. These are (i) Senna products (ii) Bisacodyl preparations (iii) Dioctyl preparations (iv) Kin mouthwash (v) Bioextra products (vi) Phosphate and Arachis Oil enemas. Duraphat can also be approved but only for patients with Head and Neck Cancers.<sup>6</sup>

Table 1: Medicines Commonly Used in Palliative Care which are NOT reimbursable on the DPS or GMS<sup>7</sup>

Prescription Medicine	Licence Status	Non-Prescription Medicine	License Status
Alfentanil 500microgram/ml INJ	L	Anusol Ointment	L
Alfentanil 5mg/ml INJ	ULM	Anusol Suppositories	L
Amitriptyline 25mg/5ml suspension	L	Aveeno cream with menthol	L
Dexamethasone 0.5mg tablet	ULM	BioXtra gel*	L
Dexamethasone 10mg/5ml liquid	L	Bisacodyl suppositories 10mg (Dulcolax)*	L
Dexamethasone 4mg/ml INJ	L	Bisacodyl tablets 5mg*	L
Diazepam 10mg/5ml suspension	ULM	Chlorhexidine mouthwash 0.2%*	L
Diazepam 2mg/5ml suspension	ULM	Glycerine Suppositories 4g	L
Docusate 100mg cap (Dioctyl)*	ULM	Hyoscine hydrobromide 300micrograms (Kwells)	L
Fentanyl 50micrograms/ml INJ	L	Ibuprofen suppositories 60mg	L
Fleet Ready-to Use enema*	L	Ibuprofen suspension 100mg/5ml	L
Glycopyrrolate 1mg tablet	ULM	Microlette	L
Hydromorphone 50mg/ml INJ	L	Milpar	L
Ketamine 10mg/ml INJ	L	Paracetamol sachets 1g (Panadol Max)	L
Ketamine 50mg/ml INJ	L	Paracetamol suspension 250mg/5ml	L
Levomepromazine 6mg tab (Levinan)	ULM	Senna liquid*	L
Levetiracetam 100mg/ml INJ (Keppra)	L	Senna tablets*	L
Methadone 10mg/ml INJ	ULM	Sodium picosulfate liquid 5mg/5ml	L
Methadone 10mg/ml oral liquid	ULM		
Metoclopramide 5mg/5ml oral liquid	ULM		
Midazolam buccal liquid (Epistatus) <sup>#</sup>	ULM		
Ondansetron 4mg/2ml, 8mg/4ml INJ (Zofran®)	L		
Phenobarbital 15mg/ml, 30mg/ml, 60mg/ml INJ	L		
Phenobarbital 200mg/ml INJ	ULM		
Sodium valproate 400mg (Epilim®) INJ	L		

\*These medicines will be covered under the hardship scheme as per PCRS Circular Number 48/16

This list is not inclusive of all medicines that are not reimbursable on the GMS or DPS schemes. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information in this table is accurate. However, items may become reimbursable at a later date. Please consult with a community pharmacist or check the list of reimbursable items available from the HSE ([www.pcrs.ie](http://www.pcrs.ie)).

# Buccolam (midazolam) oromucosal prefilled syringes 2.5mg, 5mg, 7.5mg and 10mg are reimbursable on the GMS and DPS schemes.

## References

- 1) Primary Care Reimbursement Service Circular Number 008/17. Available from [www.pcrs.ie](http://www.pcrs.ie). Accessed on the 26/04/2017.
- 2) Your Guide to the Drugs Payment Scheme. Available from [www.pcrs.ie](http://www.pcrs.ie). Accessed on the 26/04/2017.
- 3) Your Guide to the Long-Term Illness Scheme. Available from [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie). Accessed on the 26/04/2017
- 4) Your Guide to Hepatitis C - Services. Available from [www.hse.ie](http://www.hse.ie). Accessed on the 26/04/2017.
- 5) PCRS Handbook for Pharmacists 2006. Primary Care Reimbursement Service. Available from [www.pcrs.ie](http://www.pcrs.ie). Accessed on the 26/04/2017.
- 6) Primary Care Reimbursement Service Circular Number 48/16. Available from [www.pcrs.ie](http://www.pcrs.ie). Accessed on the 12/05/2017.
- 7) List of reimbursable items online checker. Available from <https://www.sspcrs.ie/druglist>. Accessed on the 27/04/2017.