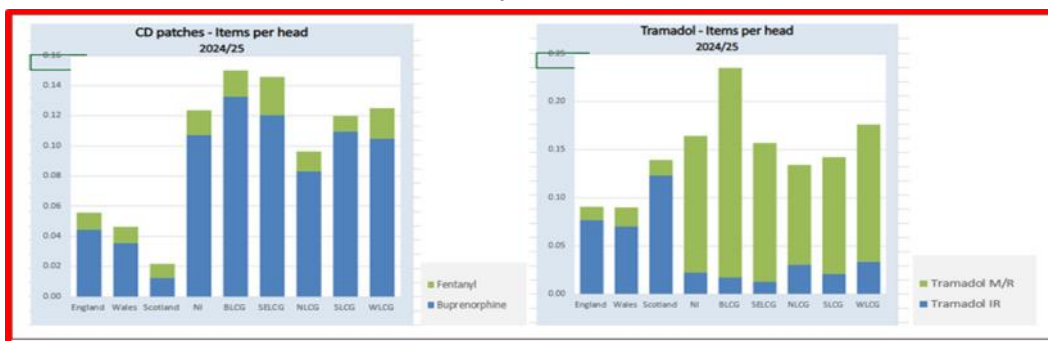


NORTHERN IRELAND MEDICINES MANAGEMENT Newsletter

Volume 17 Issue 1 January 2026

Avoid Modified-Release Opioids

Modified release (MR) opioids are associated with increased total opioid load, and related adverse effects including dependence. **MR opioids should be avoided** for chronic non-cancer pain unless clinical considerations or individual circumstances dictate otherwise. In Northern Ireland, prescribing of the following **strong MR opioids** in particular, is **significantly higher** than other parts of the UK - tramadol MR, fentanyl and buprenorphine patches.



Prescribers are reminded, for chronic non-cancer pain:

- Strong opioids are **not recommended** by NICE (exceptions only) and **not** included in the NI formulary.
- All patients prescribed opioids should be reviewed at least **6 monthly**, educated on opioid **risks** and **side-effects** and alternatives to help manage pain, e.g. Community pain support **programmes**, "**Live Well with Pain**".

Action:

Follow **NICE** and **NI formulary**:

- Prioritise patients prescribed MR opioids for review. Further prioritise higher doses.
- Aim to reduce the dose slowly, taking account of **shared decision making**.

Resources to support prescribing/review are available **here** e.g. Opioid Resource Pack, which contains sample letters, patient information leaflets and practice policies. See also **SPPG Chronic Pain Supplement April 25**.

Successful Reduction of Tramadol Prescribing in a Practice

Scotch Quarter GP Practice in Carrickfergus significantly reduced their tramadol prescribing using a Quality Improvement (QI) approach.

What did the practice do?

- All staff involved**, including reception team who supported the messages
- New 'Practice Opioid Policy' e.g. tramadol 100mg MR new maximum dose, patients on oral morphine equivalent (OME) >20mg reviewed
- Targeted tramadol 400mg MR /day initially (OME 40mg)
- Face-to-face chronic pain reviews
- Distributed their own 'Patient Information Leaflet'
- Engaged local **Arthritis UK** services

Sample of Results

- 83% reduction in tramadol MR 400mg and no new patients on this dose
- Reduction in overall tramadol and also fentanyl patches and oral morphine, oxycodone, tapentadol (lowest in federation), and co-codamol
- Positive patient feedback (using questionnaire)

If you would like to find out more please contact nancy.conroy@gp.hscni.net.

In this Issue

- Avoid Modified Release Opioids
- Successful Reduction of Tramadol Prescribing in a Practice
- NICE Guidance Recently published
- Managed Entry decisions
- Immunise, Protect, Thrive
- Cost-effective Prescribing of Emollient Creams

NICE Guidance

Recently published:

[NICE TA1110](#)

Managed Entry decisions:

Isatuximab (Sarclisa®)
Encorafenib (Braftovi®)
Belzutifan (Welireg®)
Durvalumab (Imfinzi®)
Garadacimab (Andembry®)
Enfortumab (Padcev®)
Trastuzumab deruxtecan (Enhertu®)
Letermovir (Prevymis®)
Dupilumab (Dupixent®)
Lorlatinib (Lorviqua®)
Belantamab mafodotin (Blenrep®)
Cabotegravir (Apretude®)
Cabotegravir (Apretude®)
Darolutamide (Nubeqa®)
Delgocitinib (Anzupgo®)
Vanzacaftor-tezacaftor-Deutivacaftor (Alyftrek®)

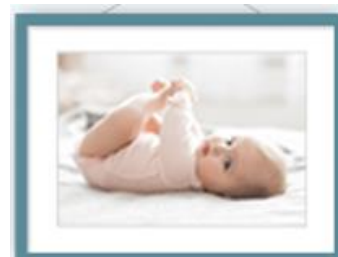
Scotch Quarter Practice



Why reduce your Opiate pain medication?

Immunise, Protect, Thrive

Recent changes to the childhood immunisation schedule are being highlighted to the public through a new *Living Well* campaign 'Immunise, protect, thrive', running in community pharmacies across NI during February/March 2026 to support the schedule changes which commenced on 1st January 2026.



Community Pharmacy
Living Well
Campaign

The 'Immunise, protect, thrive' campaign aims to raise awareness and highlight the importance of vaccination in protecting children from ill health. Parents/guardians can be signposted to their local pharmacy to pick up an [information leaflet](#) and other resources. Further information on this and previous campaigns is [available](#).

Immunise, protect, thrive. Because every child deserves the strongest start.

Cost-Effective Prescribing of Emollient Creams

In Northern Ireland, over **£1.25 million** is spent annually on emollient creams that are either non-formulary (E45[®], Epaderm[®], Oilatum[®], Aveeno[®], Diprobace Advance Eczema[®]) or should only be prescribed when the cost-effective alternative is unsuitable (Cetraben[®]).

Emollients have a key role in the management of dry, itchy skin conditions such as eczema and psoriasis. There is no evidence to support the use of one emollient over another so the least expensive one that is effective should be prescribed (see [PrescQIPP Bulletin 372 October 2025: Emollients](#) - log-in required). Emollients should not be prescribed for non-clinical cosmetic purposes such as mild dry skin which should be managed via self-care.

Actions for GP practices

- Only prescribe emollients for patients with a diagnosed dermatological condition
- Prescribe cost-effective emollients in line with the [Northern Ireland Formulary \(NIF\)](#)
- Review prescribing of emollient creams and only continue if clinically indicated
- Switch current prescribing to a [cost-effective alternative](#) where possible
- Ensure that patients are made aware of the [safe use of emollients](#)

Action for Community Pharmacists

Provide advice and reassurance to patients whose prescription has been changed or stopped and remind regarding safe use of emollients such as avoiding any naked flame.

Non cost-effective emollient creams	Cost / 500g/ml	NIF emollient cream to prescribe	Cost / 500g
Aveeno [®] (ACBS): Colloidal oatmeal	£7.59	Epimax [®] Oatmeal: Colloidal oatmeal	£3.19
Cetraben [®] : White soft paraffin 13.2%, Light liquid paraffin 10.5%	£6.38	Epimax [®] Excetra: White soft paraffin 13.2%, Light liquid paraffin 10.5%	£3.18
Diprobace [®] : White soft paraffin 15%, Liquid paraffin 6% (reformulated as Diprobace [®] Advance Eczema)	£7.70	Epimax [®] Original: White soft paraffin 15%, Liquid paraffin 6%	£2.74
Oilatum [®] White soft paraffin 15%, Light liquid paraffin 6%	£8.57		
E45 [®] : White soft paraffin 14.5%, Light liquid paraffin 12.6%, Anhydrous lanolin 1%	£7.42	Epimax [®] Excetra or Epimax [®] Original: See above for ingredients	See above
Epaderm [®] : Yellow soft paraffin 15%, Liquid paraffin 10%, Cetomacrogol emulsifying wax 5%	£7.34	Epimax [®] Excetra or Epimax [®] Original: See above for ingredients	See above

Costs from DM&D January 2026

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