



Press Release

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CUTS TO GLUTEN-FREE PRESCRIPTIONS BY BASILDON & BRENTWOOD CCG COULD COST THE NHS MORE IN THE LONG RUN

Coeliac UK is strongly opposing the proposed cuts to gluten-free prescriptions by Basildon & Brentwood Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) for patients in the region diagnosed with coeliac disease.

The charity is concerned these cuts will leave vulnerable patients with coeliac disease without support which will affect their ability to stick to the gluten-free diet. The potential serious long term health complications of not maintaining a gluten-free diet include osteoporosis, infertility and, in some rare cases, small bowel cancer, conditions that could cost the NHS a lot more in the long run.

The CCG is currently consulting with local patients and carers about their views on whether to continue to prescribe gluten-free foods in the area as part of a wider consultation on a range of services provided by the CCG. The survey, which can be found at: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/Fit-for-the-Future-SRP asks just one question about gluten-free prescriptions without explaining the role they play in managing coeliac disease, a serious lifelong autoimmune condition.

Sarah Sleet, chief executive of Coeliac UK, the national charity for people with coeliac disease said: "The lack of explanation of the role of gluten-free prescriptions in helping people maintain their diet, the only treatment for coeliac disease, seriously loads the dice when it comes to the consultation. It is vital that people who respond to the survey understand the full impact of the choices they make."

The consultation is running until 12 September 2016 and a series of public events are also being held. The charity would like to encourage all those that might be affected to complete the questionnaire so that their opinions are heard.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition caused by a reaction to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. The charity refutes the claims by Basildon & Brentwood CCG where in their consultation discussion document it states:

'With the variety of gluten free products widely available to buy at a reasonable cost, the CCG feels there will be minimal impact to patients.'

Gram for gram, gluten-free bread is six times more expensive* than regular gluten containing bread in the supermarket. Whilst other gluten-free food staples such as pasta, are three to four times more expensive than gluten-containing counterparts and availability is limited in rural areas, discount supermarkets and small stores. Having access to gluten-free staple foods on prescription provides an essential level of support to individuals trying to keep to the gluten-free diet which is the only treatment for coeliac disease.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that the cost of gluten-free food to the NHS equates to £194.24 per diagnosed patient per year, making it an extremely low cost treatment.

Ms Sleet, said: "The proposal by Basildon and Brentwood CCG to remove gluten-free prescription services for everyone over the age of 18 with coeliac disease – apart from pregnant women, is being based on budgets rather than patient need or clinical evidence. The provision of gluten-free staple food on prescription is a vital element of the support offered to all patients by the NHS and it is essential to prevent long term damage to health. Simple switching to alternative carbs such as rice and potatoes risks malnutrition with bread alone providing between 10 and 20% of our most important nutrients such as protein, calcium and iron but potatoes and rice only providing a fraction of this."

In England, prescriptions for gluten-free food are not free of charge unless someone already qualifies for free prescriptions. Currently 64% of CCGs across the country adhere to National Prescribing Guidelines, providing recommendations for GPs and policymakers on reasonable amounts of gluten-free staple foods such as bread, flour and pasta per patient per month.

Coeliac UK is also concerned that the Basildon and Brentwood CCG consultation discussion document does not once reference coeliac disease. Gluten-free foods on prescription are only approved by the Advisory Committee on Borderline Substances (ACBS) for patients with a medical diagnosis of coeliac disease.

"We do not feel that the sparse information provided and just one question on the survey provides enough detail for people completing the survey who do not have coeliac disease themselves. For someone medically diagnosed with coeliac disease there is no choice but to stick to a gluten-free diet, day in day out for life and so access to gluten-free staples is critical, and not as easy as you might think. The expansion of Free From aisles in large supermarkets masks the reality of very patchy provision. In particular, small stores and budget supermarkets have little, if any, gluten-free staples. Additionally, high prices make

such products unaffordable for some. Both these issues put those the most in need at risk – those on a limited budget or with limited mobility,” continued Ms Sleet.

Ends

Notes to editor

- Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body’s immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
- 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease
- A wide range of case studies are available on request from Coeliac UK.
- Average time to diagnosis is 13 years.
- 1 in 4 people diagnosed with coeliac disease had previously been diagnosed with IBS.
- Gluten is a protein found in wheat (including spelt), rye and barley. Some people are also sensitive to oats. Obvious sources of gluten include breads, pastas, flours, cereals, cakes and biscuits. It is often used as an ingredient in many favourite foods such as fish fingers, sausages, gravies, sauces and soy sauce.
- Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at www.coeliac.org.uk

* Comparative costs for gluten-free bread and gluten containing bread as of 4 July 2016

Gluten-free loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco-free from white sliced (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Tesco-free from fresh bread (550g) (white or brown)	£0.36	£2.00
Asda free from white sliced bread (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Asda free from brown sliced bread (550g)	£0.27	£1.50
Sainsbury’s free from sliced (400g) white or brown	£0.50	£2.00

Compared to gluten containing

Gluten containing loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco everyday value bread (800g) (white or brown)	£0.05	£0.40
Tesco bread (800g) (white or brown)	£0.06	£0.50
Asda Baker’s Selection (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.50
Asda chosen by you (800g) wholemeal	£0.09	£0.75
Sainsbury’s basics bread (800g) white or brown	£0.05	£0.40
Sainsbury’s bread (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose essential (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose bread (800g) white or wholegrain	£0.17	£1.35

Note: for Morrison and Waitrose customers there is not an own brand gluten-free version. Genius bread (gluten-free) is available at £2.90 for a 535g loaf (£0.54 per 100g) or Warburtons gluten-free is available at £3.00 for a 560g loaf (£0.54 per 100g)