



Press Release

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CUTS TO GLUTEN-FREE PRESCRIPTIONS BY CLINICAL COMMISSIONING GROUPS ACROSS LINCOLNSHIRE COULD COST THE NHS MORE IN THE LONG RUN

Coeliac UK is strongly opposing the proposed cuts to gluten-free prescriptions for patients across Lincolnshire following the announcement of a joint consultation by the Lincolnshire East Clinical Commissioning Group, Lincolnshire West Clinical Commissioning Group, South Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group and South West Lincolnshire Clinical Commissioning Group.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition caused by a reaction to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. The charity believes any cuts to gluten-free prescriptions will leave vulnerable patients with coeliac disease without support which will affect their ability to stick to the gluten-free diet, which is the only treatment for the condition. 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 National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has calculated that the cost of gluten-free food to the NHS equates to £194.24¹ per diagnosed patient per year, making it an extremely low cost treatment which supports their health and quality of life. Over a 40-year period this is approximately £7,770 per patient whilst the cost of treatment for a hip fracture is £12,170². A figure which can increase by £70,000 per patient if cases become more complex³, which not only means a greater financial cost to the NHS but a huge personal cost to the individual patient when adherence to the gluten-free diet is a preventative measure.

Last year the four CCGs across Lincolnshire spent a total of £472,000 on prescribed gluten-free foods for all patients in the region.

The CCGs in Lincolnshire currently follow National Prescribing Guidelines and prescribe up to 18 units a month (depending on age and gender) of gluten-free staple foods. However, the CCGs are now reviewing the policy on gluten-free prescribing and are considering totally cutting or restricting gluten-free prescribing.

The consultation is running until the 18 November 2016 and the online survey can be found on each of the CCG's websites. Including at:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/LincolnshireCCGsMedicinesManagement.

The charity would like to encourage all those that might be affected to complete the questionnaire so that their opinions are heard.

The charity refutes the claim in the joint consultation document where it states:

'Today gluten-free foods are widely available at competitive prices in almost all major supermarkets.'

Sarah Sleet, chief executive of Coeliac UK said: "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 is 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 most in need at risk – those on a limited budget or with limited mobility."

Whilst gluten-free food staples such as pasta, are three to four times more expensive than comparable gluten-containing products, gram for gram, gluten-free bread is six times more expensive* than regular gluten containing bread in the supermarket. On top of this 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.

"Any reduction in the gluten-free prescription services for people with coeliac disease 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," continued Ms Sleet.

Coeliac UK is also concerned over these comments in the consultation document where it states:

'There is a lot of information available to patients via the GP, dietitian or available online about how to eat a healthy gluten-free diet using replacement foods such as rice or potatoes.'

"Simply switching to alternative carbohydrates 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," explained Ms Sleet.

In England, prescriptions for gluten-free food are not free of charge unless someone already qualifies for free prescriptions. Currently 60% 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.

Ends

¹ Based on NICE Guidance NG20 Appendix G: Full Health Economics Report, 2015 annual cost of £194.94 for 40 years, figures not adjusted for inflation. Typical age at diagnosis 30-35yrs, average age span in the UK 70-75yrs.

² Falling Standards, Broken Promises Report of the national audit of falls and bone health in older people 2010. Royal College of Physician, 2011

³ NHS Standard Contract for Specialised Orthopaedics, Schedule 2 – The Services, A. Service Specifications, NHS England, D10/S/a, 2013.

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 12 September 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
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 bread)	£0.06	£0.50
Asda Baker's Selection (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.50
Asda chosen by you (800g) wholemeal	£0.06	£0.50
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) sliced white bread	£0.13	£1.00
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Note: for Morrison and Waitrose customers there is not an own brand gluten-free version.
Genius bread (gluten-free) is available at £2.83 for a 535g loaf (£0.53 per 100g) or Warburtons
gluten-free is available at £3.00 for a 560g loaf (£0.54 per 100g)