



Tell Us Your Views

Gluten-Free Prescribing

Background

A Clinical Commissioning Group is a local NHS organisation created to enable GPs to buy the health services their patients need. NHS Airedale Wharfedale and Craven CCG, (AWC CCG), is responsible for assessing the needs of the population covered by 16 GP practices, deciding which health services to purchase to meet these needs and monitoring the quality of the services that are delivered.

The CCG is led by a Governing Body of elected local GPs supported by other clinicians, lay members and NHS managers.

Managing our budget

The NHS is under pressure to manage limited budgets. The challenge faced by our CCG is how to spend our budget in a way that provides best value for money, benefits the health of the whole population and also ensures that services meet the needs of individuals.

We are facing our own financial challenges. With a growing population and ever increasing demand for an expanding range of services, there is a gap between what we need to spend to keep up with demand and the money we have. Without making changes now, money will not be available for the future transformation of services and to meet future demand.

Prescribing gluten-free foods



For over 30 years the NHS has prescribed gluten-free foods, like bread, flour, cereal and pasta, to patients who have been diagnosed with Coeliac disease and therefore need to follow a gluten-free diet. We began prescribing gluten-free foods when products were expensive and difficult to source. Today these foods have become widely available, and sold at prices much lower than those paid by the NHS.

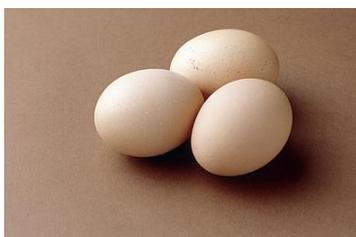
However our CCG is still spending over £100,000 per year, (of which £67,000 is spent on bread), to provide gluten-free products on prescription. Nationally this spend is over £22million.

Our proposals

Like all NHS organisations we regularly review all of the services we commission to make sure we are using NHS funds appropriately and fairly.

We are constantly looking at ways to save money without impacting on patient care and this means we need to look at how we can do things differently. As part of the Quality, Innovation, Productivity and Prevention programme, we began a review of our policy on the prescribing of gluten free foods.

AWC CCG is now considering options for prescribing gluten-free food. Any consideration to change a service is not taken lightly. In this document we explain why we are considering a change and **we would like to hear your views** whether you are prescribed gluten-free food or not. We will consider these, before taking any decisions.



What is gluten-free food?

Gluten is a type of protein that is found in three types of cereals; wheat, barley and rye.

Gluten-free foods are recommended for the 1 in a 100 people who have been medically diagnosed with coeliac disease, or gluten sensitivity conditions, and who want to continue to eat similar foods to the ones that contain gluten, such as bread and pasta.

Lots of foods are naturally gluten free such as fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, chicken, fish, cheese, eggs and lentils. Eating manufactured gluten-free foods is often a lifestyle choice. People do not have to eat these foods to remain well.

Why do people need a gluten-free diet?

Coeliac disease is a long term condition that is a lifelong, serious auto-immune disease. Caused by the immune system reacting to gluten, this damages the surface of the small bowel and disrupts the body's ability to absorb nutrients from food. The only way to reverse this damage is to remove gluten from the diet.

“There is no cure. The only treatment is a strict gluten-free diet for life”



Why do people have gluten-free food prescribed?

We began prescribing gluten-free foods when these were not easily available to buy. In recent years there has been a dramatic increase in the range and availability of gluten-free products in most supermarkets, leading to a wider choice and lower prices than previously.

It is much more expensive for the NHS to supply gluten-free foods to patients than it is for patients to buy them. This is because the NHS uses the same prescription process as they do for medicines. As a result gluten-free bread, for example, can cost double that of a supermarket loaf of bread.

What do we currently prescribe?

Access to gluten-free food on prescription is managed by GPs and the food is supplied by pharmacists. We currently allow a limited number of gluten-free “staple foods” each month for those with a medical diagnosis of coeliac disease. These include bread loaves and rolls, bread and flour mix, plain crackers and crispbreads, pasta, unsweetened breakfast cereal and pizza bases.

Extra items are allowed for women who are in their third trimester of pregnancy or breastfeeding.

The prescriptions are not free of charge, unless you qualify for free prescriptions. People can also buy a pre-payment certificate.



Why are we considering a change?

“We consider how to use our prescribing budget in the most effective and equitable way to improve the health of our whole population”

We have been reviewing treatments that are shown to be less clinically effective, provide insufficient health benefits and do not present good value for money. We have reviewed gluten-free prescribing against these measures.

We have considered the following evidence:-

- There is no strong clinical evidence that patients receiving gluten-free food on prescription are more likely to comply with a gluten-free diet, or have better health or outcomes than those who do not.
- Provision of food for a restricted diet is not a requirement of a health service.
- There are a number of widely available, naturally gluten-free carbohydrates that can be used instead of foods like bread and pasta. These include rice, potatoes and flour alternatives such as millet and corn flour.
- Gluten is not essential to a healthy diet and can be replaced by other foods. There is a lot of information available about how to eat a healthy gluten-free diet.
- There are many options for patients to obtain a wide range of gluten-free products. Changes to the law means food labelling has improved and it is easier to see which foods contain gluten.
- We could invest the money we spend on gluten-free prescribing, over £100,000 every year, on other services.
- The NHS does not provide food on prescription for some other groups of patients whose conditions are affected by the type of food they eat, for example, diabetics, people with high blood pressure or high cholesterol. These are also conditions which can be managed by eating a diet naturally free from certain ingredients.
- We need to balance the health and wellbeing of our patients with the need to share our resources equitably across all of our population.

The money we spend on gluten-free prescribing is the equivalent to the average cost of about 15 hip replacements, 25 single pacemakers, 125 cataract procedures, 527 first out-patient appointments or 454 A&E visits.

What options are we considering?

AWC CCG is considering recommending to local GP's that they stop prescribing gluten free foods; whilst this has been a preference during early discussions, we recognise that this may not be supported by local people and should be tested more widely. We want to ensure that our future discussions, prior to making a decision, take into account, among other things the views and needs of local people and other stakeholders. Therefore, we are asking for your views on the following options for those with a clinical diagnosis of coeliac disease:-

- To stop providing gluten-free food on prescription.
- To only prescribe gluten-free food for individuals on a case by case basis.
- To prescribe some gluten-free food, but limit the amount and type of products, for example to bread and flour.
- To only prescribe gluten-free food for patients who receive free prescriptions.
- No change; gluten free-food should continue to be prescribed as it currently is.

How are we engaging on these proposals?

- We have already discussed these proposals with our Governing Body.
- We have reviewed what other CCGs have done, or are considering doing, about gluten free prescribing. Many have ceased or restricted their prescribing.
- We are now inviting patients, stakeholders and the wider public, as well as local health professionals, to tell us their views.



How to get in touch

Please complete our online survey



You can find this on the CCGs website at:

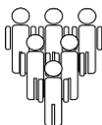
<http://www.airedalewharfedalecravenccg.nhs.uk/have-your-say-about-gluten-free-food-on-prescription>



You can fill in the form with this leaflet and return it to NHS AWC CCG, Millennium Business Park, Station Road, Steeton, Keighley, BD20 6RB



You can send us an email to: engage@awcccq.nhs.uk



You can come to a meeting. The CCG will hold drop in sessions and the dates will be advertised in the local press and on our website. Members of the CCG will be available to answer questions and talk through the proposals.



Thank you for taking time to give your feedback. The responses we receive will be used as part of a report which will help inform our final decision. If you would like a copy of the final report, please email your name and address, titled gluten free, to engage@awcccq.nhs.uk