WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- Prednisolone soluble tablets currently cost over 30 times as much as plain tablets in Primary Care. The difference between the two in secondary care is even greater.
- Based on 6 months’ figures in 2014, Primary Care in the East Midlands spends over £900,000 on soluble prednisolone 5mg tablets annually. Soluble tablets accounted for only 6% of the prescriptions but cost more than all the other (94%) prescriptions for this strength of tablet.
- If half of the prescriptions for soluble prednisolone had been plain tablets instead, nearly £500,000 would be available each year in the East Midlands to spend on other treatments.

ADDITIONAL LOCAL DATA HERE

WHAT IS THE EVIDENCE?

- Prednisolone is used widely for short courses in inflammatory and allergic disorders and occasionally for longer term immunosuppression.
- Both 1mg and 5mg strengths are relatively small tablets and do not present a problem in swallowing for the majority of patients.
- Prednisolone is generally well absorbed after taking orally and the bioavailability of the soluble and plain tablets are similar.
- Soluble tablets may be justified in a limited number of clinical situations, for example those with fine-bore enteral feeding tubes. However administration of plain prednisolone tablets is faster for nursing and care staff and may be more convenient for patients.
- Limited anecdotal information suggests that the plain tablets disperse in water to make a fine suspension (unlicensed use).

WHAT ARE THE COSTS?

Costs based on Drug Tariff prices, January 2015

- Prednisolone soluble 10mg daily for 28 days: £79.85
- Prednisolone plain 10mg daily for 28 days: £2.44
- Prednisolone soluble 40mg daily for 5 days: £57.04
- Prednisolone plain 40mg daily for 5 days: £1.74

KEY MESSAGES

- Plain prednisolone tablets are significantly cheaper than soluble ones and should be preferred in the majority of patients.
- Soluble tablets are more time consuming than plain tablets for parents, carers and nursing staff.
- Patients taking soluble tablets should be reviewed regularly with a view to changing to plain where appropriate.
- Older children may find plain tablets more convenient to take than soluble ones.

References: