

## **Lithium Patient Information Standards**

Lithium is an effective but potentially high risk medicine. The NHS GG&C Lithium Standards require services to provide patients and carers with information that allows patients to make an informed choice about lithium treatment and to continue to take it safely. The purpose of this document is to make mental health staff aware of the sources of information available to them and to define the responsibilities of staff in providing information.

### **Information standards**

1. All new patients for whom lithium treatment is being considered will be given appropriate information to allow them to make an informed choice. Where patients lack capacity or are to receive compulsory treatment via a T2 or T3, information will be provided commensurate to their needs and capability.
2. At regular intervals (minimum annually) throughout lithium treatment, patients information needs will be assessed and appropriate information provided.

### **Information Resources**

The information needs of patients will vary over time and often need to be tailored to their capacity and mental state at different stages of their illness. The principle of the recent Montgomery ruling<sup>1</sup>, is that patients are provided with information regarding material risks of treatment sufficient to allow a 'reasonable' person to make an informed choice. Alternative treatments should also be discussed. In the context of lithium such information will cover:

- What it is
- What it is for
- Benefits of treatment
- How it works
- How long treatment is likely to last
- Compliance advice - How to take it including what to do about missed doses
- The need for regular blood and physical health checks; explaining their frequency and purpose
- Very common and common side effects and what to do about them
- Significant interactions especially NSAIDs and antihypertensives
- Signs, symptoms and causes of toxicity
- Lifestyle advice
- Family planning and pregnancy where appropriate

With these topics in mind the following resources are recommended to clinical staff to use to provide information to potential patients or existing patients prescribed lithium.

## **Recommended sources of Information**

### **1. Choice and Medication website**

This includes a variety of patient information leaflets (in a variety of formats and languages), handy fact sheets and handy charts. These will be used to provide detailed information and reinforce verbal counselling to all prospective lithium patients and on specific issues for existing patients.

<http://www.choiceandmedication.org/nhs24/>

### **2. Bipolar Scotland**

Provides a range of support materials and information for people with Bipolar disorder

<https://www.bipolarscotland.org.uk/>

### **3. Royal College of Psychiatrists**

Provides a range of support materials and information for people with Bipolar disorder

<https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mental-health/problems-disorders/bipolar-disorder>

### **4. Birmingham University**

Provides a range of leaflets specifically for people with reading or learning difficulties.

<https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/college-les/psych/ld/medicine-information/Lithium.pdf>

## **NHS GG&C lithium information leaflets**

These leaflets were developed jointly by mental health services and Bipolar Scotland as part of the development work for the Bipolar Hub project. The following topics are covered

- The importance of taking lithium regularly
- The need for regular blood tests
- Common interactions that affect lithium
- Other factors that affect lithium levels
- Common lithium side effects and what to do about them
- Signs of toxicity

These leaflets will be issued to all prospective patients and be given to each patient prescribed lithium with their discharge prescriptions. Ward clinical pharmacists will use them to support one to one patient education. The leaflets are available from Leverndale Pharmacy.

### **Information produced by lithium manufacturers**

The UK manufacturers provide a variety of patient information resources on lithium tailored to their product. These can be used to compliment the resources above if necessary. Contact Leverndale Pharmacy for advice.

### **Responsibilities of Healthcare Professionals**

All healthcare professionals directly involved in the care of patients prescribed lithium have duty to supply appropriate information as necessary.

### **Prospective patients**

For all patients for whom lithium treatment is being considered it is the duty of the ward or CMHT multidisciplinary team to ensure each patient's information needs are assessed and met. Ideally all prospective patients will have the opportunity to discuss treatment with a clinical pharmacist prior to treatment starting. However this may not always be possible in which case appropriate members of the MDT will provide the information as outlined in the information resources section above. Consideration with regards to the level of initial information provided may depend on the patient's mental state at the time.

### **Patients already prescribed lithium**

Appropriate members of the MDT whether that be in hospital wards or community mental health teams will regularly assess and meet the information needs of patients prescribed lithium under their care. They will use the resources outlined above to meet those needs.

### **Record keeping**

A clear record of information provided to patient including salient points discussed must be documented in the chronological account of care.

Developed by: Mental Health Pharmacy

Approved by: Prescribing Management Group- Mental Health

### **References:**

1. [Montgomery \(Appellant\) v Lanarkshire Health Board \(Respondent\) \(Scotland\) - UK Supreme Court](#)