

Prescribing and Travel Abroad

Under NHS legislation, the NHS ceases to have responsibility for people when they leave the UK.

However, to ensure good patient care, the following guidance is offered. People travelling within Europe should be advised to carry the European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) at all times; this gives entitlement to local healthcare arrangements.

Patients are advised to check specific entitlements and appropriate health advice prior to travel and obtain adequate travel insurance cover.

Guidance for GPs on risk assessment for travellers and appropriate advice is available from the National Travel Health and Network Centre (NaTHNaC) and TRAVAX websites.

Medication required for a pre-existing condition should be provided in sufficient quantity to cover the journey and to allow the patient to obtain medical attention abroad. If the patient is returning within the timescale of a normal prescription (usually one and no more than three months) then this should be issued, providing it is clinically appropriate.

Patients carrying certain prescribed medication for their own personal use may require a doctor's letter or a personal licence. This will depend on the duration of travel, the type of medicine (e.g. codeine, Sativex) and the country of travel.

Patients who require over-the-counter (OTC) medicines should check that the medicine is available OTC in the country of destination.

For longer visits abroad (e.g. more than three months), the patient should be advised to register with a local doctor in the destination country for continuing medication; this may need to be paid for by the patient.

It is wise for the patient to check with the manufacturer that medicines required are available in the country being visited. GPs are

not required to provide prescriptions for medication that is requested solely in anticipation of the onset of an ailment whilst outside the UK, but for which treatment is not required at the time of prescribing (e.g. travel sickness, diarrhoea). Patients should be advised to purchase these items in the UK prior to travel; advice is available from community pharmacists if required.

A private prescription may be provided for any prescription-only medicines if deemed appropriate and necessary, such as ciprofloxacin for traveller's diarrhoea (for use outside Asia).

Patients should be advised about the appropriate use of self medication and when they would need to seek medical attention abroad.

Travellers should consider carrying a personal emergency medical travel kit tailored to their needs and their travel destination (advice on what to include is available from the NaTHNaC and TRAVAX websites).

There are occasions where the traveller may wish to include prescription-only medicine (POM) items and/or plasma substitutes in their personal emergency medical travel kit. A private prescription is required for the former.