

Prescribing and Medicines Optimisation Guidance

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Mental Health, Learning Disability, and Autism Special Edition

This special edition bulletin highlights local actions and outlines ways in which healthcare professionals can support people with mental health conditions, a learning disability, or autism, with a focus on prescribing and medicines optimisation.

Learning Disability and Mental Health Awareness Weeks

[Mental Health Awareness Week](#) this year takes place from **Monday 11 May to Sunday 17 May 2026**. The theme set by the Mental Health Foundation is to **TAKE ACTION to support good mental health**. Action may be for yourself, for someone else, for all of us.

[Learning Disability Week](#) takes place **Monday 15 to Sunday 21 June 2026**, and the theme for 2026 is “**Do you see me?**”, which is about people with a learning disability being seen, heard and valued.

Supporting resources for both of these, including email banners, Teams backgrounds and social media resources, can be found in the links above.

Safety guidance

This section highlights a safety initiative delivered by primary care teams across Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, and key safety considerations in antidepressant prescribing.

Antidepressants and suicidality

In December 2025 the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) advised the MHRA that wording on Patient Information Leaflets (PILs) for antidepressants be strengthened regarding the increased risk of worsening of suicidal behaviours upon initiation, dose change or cessation of antidepressants, particularly in adolescents and young adults (under 25).

NICE guidance [[NG222](#)] recommends that patients aged between 18 to 25 years (or otherwise at increased risk of suicide) are warned of this potential adverse effect during the early weeks of starting an antidepressant, when switching between antidepressants, and ending treatment with an antidepressant, reviewed accordingly, and advised how to seek help if required.

While the relative risk of suicidality is increased in comparison with placebo, the absolute risk remains small. Treating depression is the most effective way to reducing the risk of suicidal thoughts and acts, and antidepressants are currently the most effective drugs to treat depression.

Risk of harm from propranolol in young people

Since 2021, several reports [[HSSIB Investigation report: Potential under-recognised risk of harm from the use of propranolol](#), [Coroners' report December 2023](#) and [Coroner's report November 2024](#)] have documented concerns relating to the toxicity of propranolol in overdose, and in October 2024, the General Pharmaceutical Council published a [patient safety spotlight](#) on this under-recognised risk.

Although anxiety with symptoms such as palpitation, sweating and tremor is listed as an indication for propranolol in the BNF, its use is not recognised within NICE clinical guidelines for [General Anxiety](#) or [Social Anxiety](#) Disorder and prescribing for this in young adults is on the increase.

The Medicines Optimisation Team has worked up an [Intervention Brief](#) for a medicines safety project which can be undertaken in primary care to identify and review young people (< 25-years-old) taking propranolol, who have co-existing conditions or history that may put them at increased risk of harm from propranolol.

Local guidance

HIOW Healthcare Physical Health Monitoring for Psychotropic Medication [LINK](#)

The link is to a handy one-page summary table of physical health monitoring requirements for adult patients taking psychotropic medication and can be used by primary care clinicians to ensure all relevant monitoring is in place for patients taking these medications.

Community Pharmacy services

The services below are offered by community pharmacies across HIOW. Whilst these services do not replace the need for an Annual Health Check or Physical Health Check (for patients with learning disability or severe mental illness, respectively), some patients may find it easier to visit their local community pharmacy than a general practice. Having an awareness of these services and signposting patients to them can also ease some of the pressure felt by general practice.

- [Hypertension Case-Finding Service](#) [known publicly as the Blood Pressure Check Service]:
 - Offered by 98% of practices across HIOW
 - Adults aged 40-years or older who do not have a diagnosis of hypertension
 - Some patients under 40-years-old may also be eligible (see link for details)
 - GP practices can work with local pharmacies to agree a local process for patients who already have a diagnosis of hypertension, if wished
 - [Find a pharmacy that offers free blood pressure checks - NHS](#)
- [New Medicine Service \(NMS\) - Community Pharmacy England](#)
 - Offered by 99% of community pharmacies across HIOW
 - From late October 2025, the service was expanded to include medicines prescribed for depression. This is only for patients aged 18-years and older.
 - Three stages: Engagement, Intervention, and Follow up
 - Contact with patient at each to assess adherence, identify problems and determine patient's need for further information and support.
 - Aim is to increase effective medicines taking for long term conditions, including depression.
 - [Find a pharmacy - NHS](#)

Resources

The links below provide resources to support colleagues in delivering healthcare to people with mental health conditions, learning disabilities, or autism.

Upcoming masterclass:

- Antipsychotics in Learning Disabilities masterclass, 4 June 2026, 12 to 1pm. Register [HERE](#)

Recorded masterclasses and webinars:

- [PrescQIPP Prescribing mastery webinars](#)
- [PrescQIPP Clinical masterclasses](#)
- [National Polypharmacy Masterclass: Polypharmacy and learning disabilities](#)
- [Polypharmacy masterclass: Antidepressants in older people](#)
- [Polypharmacy masterclass: Antipsychotics in older people with dementia](#)

Practice schemes and awards which demonstrate a commitment to improving care for patients:

- [LD Friendly Practice Award](#)
- [Suicide Aware Practice Scheme](#)

HIOW ICB links:

- [Mental health - Medicines Optimisation :: NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#)
- [Learning disability and autism - Medicines Optimisation :: NHS Hampshire and Isle of Wight](#)

Tools to support conversations with patients:

- [Patient decision aids | NICE](#), includes decision aids for stopping benzodiazepines/z-drugs, and antipsychotic medication for treating behavioural and psychological symptoms of dementia (BPSD)
- [Inclusion-tool-Jan-2019-3.pdf](#) This tool can aid conversations or decision-making regarding the inclusion patients on the Learning Disability Register

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Local medicines optimisation teams can be contacted via their generic team mailbox: See [LINK](#)
Previous bulletins can be found hosted on the ICS website here: [LINK](#)