

## Fact Sheet

### Paying for INR self-monitoring devices (coagulometers) and disposable test strips

#### 1. Do I have to buy my own coagulometer to use at home?

Unfortunately, yes. Coagulometers are not yet available on NHS prescription. This is something that ACSMA is campaigning to change. ACSMA is campaigning for the meters to be made available on NHS prescription so that every patient who wishes to self-monitor their INR is not prevented from doing so on financial grounds alone

#### 2. Do I have to pay for the disposable test strips?

The disposable test strips are available on NHS prescription and can be prescribed by your GP. If you pay for your NHS prescriptions, you will have to pay the standard NHS prescription charge (currently, £8.20 per item). However, if you do not pay for your prescriptions, or have a current valid exemption certificate, you will not have to pay for the strips. The test strips have been available on prescription since 2002.

#### 3. What is the legal basis for making the strips available on prescription?

A number of blood testing strips are available for prescription under Part IXR of the Drug Tariff for England and Wales, which is compiled on behalf of the Department of Health by the NHS Business Services Authority, NHS Prescription Services.

In the current (December 2015) version of the [Drug Tariff](#), test strips for the following three meters are available on NHS prescription: Alere INRatio, Coaguchek XS PT and ProTime 3 cuvettes.<sup>1,2</sup>

#### 4. My GP is refusing to give me a prescription for the strips. Can he or she do this?

Yes. The decision whether or not to prescribe the strips rests with the treating clinician following agreement with the patient as to the most appropriate monitoring method for them. This means that some GPs will be happy to prescribe the strips, particularly if they support you self-monitoring your INR levels, but others will not. Although this may seem very unfair, it is not illegal.

Some GPs might also be acting on instructions not to prescribe the strips from their local Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) – see questions 5 and 7 below.

#### 5. My GP has told me that he cannot prescribe the strips because it is no longer allowed. Is this correct?

It depends. The Drug Tariff makes it clear that the disposable test strips can be prescribed on NHS prescription at the discretion of the GP.

However, each CCG is allowed to introduce its own prescribing policy on self-monitoring. We are aware that some CCGs are refusing to meet the cost of the strips, or are restricting the number of strips they will

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<sup>1</sup> NHS Prescription Services, NHS Business Authority. Drug Tariff for England and Wales. June 2014 edition. [http://www.ppa.org.uk/edt/June\\_2014/mindex.htm](http://www.ppa.org.uk/edt/June_2014/mindex.htm) Last accessed 3 June 2014.

<sup>2</sup> Although the strips continue to be available on prescription, the ProTime microcoagulation system is no longer available to the NHS and its successor model is not intended for patient self-monitoring.

## Fact Sheet

### Paying for INR self-monitoring devices (coagulometers) and disposable test strips

prescribe, either for financial reasons, or because they do not support anticoagulation self-monitoring for their patients.

Unfortunately, this is a matter for each CCG to decide. Although this may seem very unfair, it is not illegal.

#### 6. Can I force my GP to prescribe the strips?

We would recommend that you tell your GP:

- That you would like to self-monitor your INR levels, or that you wish to be allowed to continue to self-monitor;
- That the strips can be prescribed on NHS prescription in accordance with Part IXR of the Drug Tariff; and
- That it is the GP's decision whether or not to issue an NHS prescription and that you would like him or her to write a prescription for you.

If your GP is reluctant to prescribe test strips you could contact your local MP or CCG. Further information about approaching them can be found online in the ACSMA Campaign Toolkit.

#### 7. What is the legal position on self-monitoring? Can I force my GP/Clinical Commissioning Group to let me self-monitor my INR levels?

Unfortunately, each CCG is permitted to introduce its own policy regarding self-monitoring. This is a matter for each CCG to decide and we are aware that not every CCG supports self-monitoring. Although this may seem very unfair, it is not illegal.

For people with atrial fibrillation (AF) who need long-term anticoagulation therapy, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) published the following recommendation in June 2014 (Clinical Guideline no.180).

'In patients with atrial fibrillation (AF) who require long-term anticoagulation, self-monitoring should be considered if preferred by the patient and the following criteria are met:

- the patient is both physically and cognitively able to perform the self-monitoring test, or in those cases where the patient is not physically or cognitively able to perform self-monitoring, a designated carer is able to do so
- an adequate supportive educational programme is in place to train patients and/or carers
- the patient's ability to self-manage is regularly reviewed
- the equipment for self-monitoring is regularly checked via a quality control programme'

You can find a copy of the full guideline here: <http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/CG180>.

NICE has further backed the use of anticoagulation self-monitoring in its Diagnostic Guidance no. 14, published in September 2014, and in the Quality Standard (QS93) for Atrial Fibrillation, published in July 2015.

## Fact Sheet

### Paying for INR self-monitoring devices (coagulometers) and disposable test strips

Quality Standard no.93 can be found here: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/qs93>. The NICE Diagnostics Guidance can be found here: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/dg14>

However, it is important to be aware that these are guidelines only. It is not mandatory for every GP and CCG to allow every patient who wants to self-monitor to do so.

#### 8. My GP won't prescribe my strips but I am happy to buy them myself. Can I go ahead and self-monitor my INR?

If the health care professional who prescribes your warfarin and looks after your INR monitoring is happy to support you, then you should be able to self-monitor.

#### 9. My friend in another town is allowed to self-monitor, but I am not. Is this legal? Why is this?

Unfortunately, each CCG is permitted to introduce its own policy regarding self-monitoring. This is a matter for each CCG to decide and we are aware that not every CCG supports self-monitoring. Although this may seem very unfair, it is not illegal.

#### 10. Is there any current financial support available for patients to buy INR meters/coagulometers since they are not yet available on prescription?

Yes, some support is available:

- For children, national charities such as the [Children's Heart Federation](#) can provide help.
- Adult congenital heart patients can get support from organisations like the [Somerville Foundation](#)
- There are regional charities across the country that can offer support, also local cardiac charities.

#### 11. NICE has undertaken an evaluation of coagulometers. Won't that change everything?

In September 2014, NICE published its final guidance on two [coagulometers](#) and recommended them for use in adults with AF or with heart valve disease. NICE concluded that the two devices (the CoaguChek XS system and the INRatio 2 PT/INR monitor) are clinically-effective and cost-effective for the NHS to use.

As NICE concluded that the coagulometers represent a cost-effective use of NHS money that is great news for the [AC SMA](#) campaign and will bring us one step closer to having the devices made available on NHS prescription. In order to make the devices available on prescription, however, a successful application will need to be made by the manufactures of the monitors to the Department of Health. It is currently anticipated that this will take place some time during 2016.