

Valproate medicines safety in community pharmacy

Practice-based audit findings

November 2019



Valproate medicines are used to treat **epilepsy** and **bipolar disorder**.

If taken during pregnancy, valproate can **harm the unborn child** and lead to cognitive and developmental disorders.

Since April 2018, valproate must no longer be prescribed to women or girls of childbearing potential unless they're on a **Pregnancy Prevention Programme (PPP)**.

Over 170 million valproate medicines were dispensed across England in 2018

If valproate is taken during pregnancy...

- Up to **4 in 10** babies are at risk of **developmental disorders**
- **1 in 10** babies are at risk of **birth defects**



The community pharmacy sector decided to take action and a two-stage audit was launched in 2018 to explore the **role of pharmacy teams** in supporting girls and women taking valproate medicines.



6,761 pharmacies conducted phase one of the audit

6,480 pharmacies took part in phase two

Over **36,000** valproate prescriptions were dispensed



During the audit, **awareness** and **understanding** among pharmacy teams about the risks associated with valproate and pregnancy **increased**, but there are still continual improvements to make.

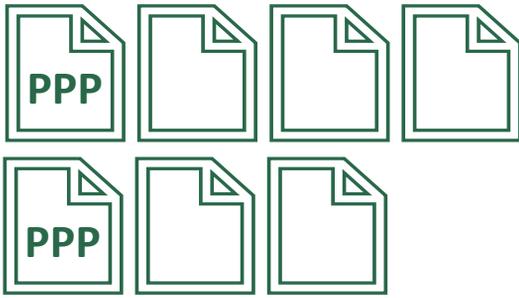


Community Pharmacy Patient Safety Group

CCA | COMPANY CHEMISTS' ASSOCIATION

94% of phase two respondents were aware of the new regulatory position

All women and girls of childbearing age taking valproate must be on a **PPP**



In phase one of the audit **1 in 4** valproate prescriptions included information about whether a PPP was in place. This improved to **1 in 3** prescriptions during phase two.

Half of patients were **not present** in the pharmacy when their valproate was dispensed



Patients who get their valproate delivered, and those represented by a carer, must get the same advice.

Following the audit, pharmacy teams committed to undertaking various **actions** to **continue improving** their practice around valproate safety:



Appoint a **valproate champion**



Undertake **CPD** on valproate safety

Engage with **locum pharmacists** and local **GPs**



Share learnings with their team



Conclusions & recommendations

This audit demonstrates the substantial role of pharmacy teams in supporting women and girls taking valproate, however there are still improvements to be made.

Community pharmacy professionals and organisations must continue to raise **awareness** about the risks of valproate and pregnancy.

Community pharmacy teams must ensure that **patient alert cards** and guidance are provided every time valproate medicines are dispensed.

Regulators should ensure that prescribers always include information on a valproate prescription about whether a **PPP** is place.

Manufacturers must ensure the continued **supply** of small valproate packs to encourage 28-day prescribing.