



A Critical Reading Question Illustrated

With reference to the literature, discussed the value of using a prescribing formulary in modern general practice

A GOOD ANSWER

Definition

- a preferred list of medication is that a group of GPs have agreed to use within their practice
- three-quarters of NHS prescribing costs by duty GP prescribing
- GPs are bombarded with information every day and have potential access to a huge range of medication. Increasing interest in formularies in the last 10 years with debate about whether they do increase the effectiveness of prescribing and over the cost of prescribing

Why Have A Formulary?

Various formularies available for many years for example British National Formulary

- main use is as an educational tool
- formularies should highlight those drugs which prescribers are familiar
- avoid drug-induced disease
- secondary benefit may be to cut costs of prescribing

Three formularies have been produced for national and regional use in recent years: the Lothian formulary, the Northern Ireland's faculty RCGP formulary and the basic Formulary for general practice (Department of primary care Newcastle, Grant Gregory and Zwanenberg). The latter was produced as part of a study to look at developing a European formulary

- The formularies should be flexible, provide adequate and appropriate treatment and encourage generic prescribing
- provides opportunity to liaise with hospital consultants, pharmacists and community pharmacist
- agree district formularies
- provides opportunity to audit practices prescribing and can be helped by using PACT data
- may encourage development of formularies for use by community nursing staff
- prescribing of dressings and so on

Arguments Against All Formularies

- prevents new ideas being generated, encourages cook-book medicine and rigidity
- not always possible to convince other partners to add a new drug
- cost is not always contained by formulary
- hospital consultants may discharge patients on medication not previously agreed
- once constructed, formulary must be kept up to date

Patients Views

Overall no difference in patient satisfaction between a practice using a practice formulary and a control practice (field 1989)

Conclusion

There is increasing pressure for doctors to prescribe effectively. Audit commission report 1994 cited in MIMS magazine comments about GPs over prescribing in some areas (for example, ulcer healing drugs) and under prescribed in others (for example, asthma). Above all, a practice formulary is a powerful learning tool.

References

- Waine et al how to produce a practice formulary our sea G. P1989
- Constructing a practice formulary drugs and therapeutics bulletin 1991 29 (7)
- Gillegan prescribing in general practice rcgp occasional paper 54 1991
- MIMS magazine 1994 21(8)
- Field J. how do doctors and patients react to the introduction of a practice formulary? Family practice June 1989: 6 (2): 135 – 40

A SATISFACTORY ANSWER

A practice formulary uses drugs voluntarily agreed by partners in a practice

Argument For A Formulary

- formulary will have medication agreed by partners
- use pact level 3 data
- valuable teaching/learning tool
- useful to GP trainees joining the practice
- ensures that treatment is acceptable to patients, safe and effective
- off-the-peg formularies available are Lothian, Northern Ireland formulary, RCGP
- potential to discuss with consultants and agree local district formularies

Argument Against

- difficult for partners to agree on drugs to be used in formulary
- time-consuming
- May not contain costs, produces rigid thinking. New patients on well tried medication joining the practice will not be keen to change.
- Influence of fundholding and indicative budget prescribing incentives

A POOR ANSWER

Arguments For

- practice formulary to help partners to discuss prescribing
- helps to keep prescribing costs down
- uses PACT data
- although medication is chosen by GPs, more government pressure to contain prescribing

Arguments Against

- time to prepare practice formulary
- partners resistant to change

Notes:

I hope the responses to this question illustrates that whilst a satisfactory answer demonstrates the candidate has considered most of the issues, to obtain the most marks, the candidate will have reflected on the literature and adopted a more considered personal view.

I also hope that these three responses illustrate the need to have read other text as well as the mainstream journals.