Polypharmacy

A CPPE distance learning programme
## Contents

### About CPPE distance learning programmes

### About this learning programme

### Glossary of key terms

## Section 1  The problem with polypharmacy

1.1 Introduction to polypharmacy

1.2 Why is polypharmacy important?

1.3 Who is affected?

1.4 Causes of polypharmacy
   - Lack of shared decision-making
   - Multimorbidity
   - Transfer of care
   - Reflex prescribing

1.5 What is the impact of polypharmacy?
   - Individual burden
   - Hospital admissions
   - Adverse drug events
   - Falls

Summary and intended outcomes

Suggested answers

Case studies

Exercise

Practice points

Reflective questions

## Section 2  Optimising medicines in polypharmacy

2.1 A patient-centred approach to medicines optimisation

2.2 Identifying people with polypharmacy for review

2.3 Medication review tools
   - STOPP START toolkit
   - Medication Appropriateness Index

Summary and intended outcomes

Suggested answer

Exercise

Reflective questions
Section 3 Patient-centred approach to managing polypharmacy

3.1 Following a patient-centred approach to managing polypharmacy in practice
   - Is the condition self-limiting? 24
   - Stop or reduce the dose 25
   - Start a new medicine 26

Summary and intended outcomes 28
Practice points 20, 22, 23, 26, 28

Section 4 Stopping medicines and supporting patients

4.1 Factors and barriers to deprescribing 29
4.2 Shared decision-making to support deprescribing 31
   - Framing effect 32
4.3 Adherence strategies 32
   - John Whitmore’s GROW coaching model 33
   - How do I get a copy of My Medication Passport? 33

Summary and intended outcomes 34
Suggested answer 34
Exercise 30
Practice points 32, 33

Section 5 Polypharmacy in different settings 35

5.1 Community pharmacy 35
5.2 Secondary care pharmacy 36
5.3 Primary care/general practice pharmacy 36

Summary and intended outcome 37
Practice points 36, 37

Practice development resources 38

References 39

Index 42

Figures and tables

- Figure 1 Polypharmacy facts and figures 2
- Figure 2 Example of a prescribing cascade 5
- Figure 3 Example of a prescribing vortex 5
- Figure 4 Medicines associated with adverse drug reactions 9
- Figure 5 Patient-centred approach to managing polypharmacy in practice 21
- Table 1 Barriers to deprescribing 30
Figure 1 below provides some key facts and figures about polypharmacy.

**FIGURE 1 Polypharmacy facts and figures**

- **By 2018**: 3 million people in the UK will have a long-term condition managed by polypharmacy.
- **2 million prescriptions** are issued each day in England.
- The number of prescriptions issued has increased by 55.2% since 2004.
- Approximately 60% of prescriptions are issued to people aged 60 years and over.
- A person taking ten or more medicines is 300% more likely to be admitted to hospital.
- A third of people aged 75 years and over are taking at least six medicines.

Patients in both primary and secondary healthcare settings are affected by polypharmacy. Managing it rationally is the responsibility of all health and social care professionals, working together with effective communication across sectors and across professions.

### 1.3 Who is affected?

The majority of the published work on polypharmacy relates to older people but attention has recently turned to it in other areas, particularly advanced cancer and end-of-life care as well as children and people with learning disabilities. We won’t cover issues specific to these clinical areas in detail in this learning programme, as the principles we cover apply to all patients. If you are interested in learning more about polypharmacy in these specific areas, you may wish to look at the following resources:

- Polypharmacy in end-of-life care: [http://ageing.oxfordjournals.org/content/40/4/419.long](http://ageing.oxfordjournals.org/content/40/4/419.long)
- Polypharmacy in people with learning disabilities: [www.england.nhs.uk/2015/07/14/urgent-pledge](www.england.nhs.uk/2015/07/14/urgent-pledge)

Older people are more likely to experience polypharmacy than younger people due to multimorbidities, many of which are age-related (for example, dementia) or more common in older people (for example, atrial fibrillation). However, there is a greater number of people living with multimorbidities who are under 65 years of age, and evidence shows that a high proportion of these people are taking multiple medicines.
For further examples of cascade prescribing with statistics, refer to the *British Medical Journal* article ‘Optimising drug treatment for elderly people: the prescribing cascade’, available at: [www.bmj.com/content/315/7115/1096](http://www.bmj.com/content/315/7115/1096)