

Forged or Fraudulent Prescriptions

The fraudulent use of prescription forms can cause financial loss to the NHS as well as harm to people who use drugs obtained illegally. NHS prescription forms should be considered an asset that has a financial value. Even if it is blank, a prescription form could be used to commit fraud, resulting in a significant impact on the NHS. This can be in the form of a financial loss for medicines fraudulently obtained, or the potential harm to the health of individuals using medicines without medical supervision.

WHAT IS A FORGED OR FRAUDULENT PRESCRIPTION?

A forged or fraudulent prescription can be a genuine prescription form which:

- has been stolen
- has been altered by someone other than an authorised prescriber (for example to increase the quantity or dose, or add additional items)
- is not signed by an authorised prescriber

or it could be a fake prescription form.

SPOTTING A FORGED OR FRAUDULENT PRESCRIPTION

What to look out for...

COLOUR OF THE PRESCRIPTION FORM PRESCRIPTION

The colours of legitimate forms are deliberately hard to copy, so a fake one tends to stand out

SERIAL NUMBERS

All prescription forms have serial numbers. An alert may have been issued by the Accountable Officer to look out for prescriptions with particular numbers

DATE PRESCRIPTION ISSUED

Remember the time intervals within which prescriptions must be presented for dispensing. There may be a genuine reason for having an old but still valid prescription, query this with the patient to establish if this seems plausible.

ADDRESS OF PRESCRIBER

You know the surgeries from which you normally get prescriptions. Some areas may see more out of town prescribers e.g. holiday areas. However bear in mind that the prescription may have been stolen

ALTERATIONS OR ADDITIONS

Alterations that have been seen include:

- overwriting both printed and handwritten items on prescriptions
- overwriting the prescriber's signature
- use of amateur type-setting kits to print onto stolen prescriptions

Does the handwriting match hand-written scripts from that prescriber that you've seen previously? Is the spacing sensible? Are the drug names spelt correctly and are the quantities and directions logical?

SIGNATURE

You tend to know the signatures of the prescribers local to the pharmacy. If the signature is not known and you are concerned, do you have another example of it in the current month's prescriptions? There has been a case where an amendment was made to a prescription and the person who did it then initialled the amendment to make it look like the GP had made the change

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE PRESENTED WITH A FORGED OR FRAUDULENT PRESCRIPTION

If threatened or if you believe that the person may become violent, then telephone the police as soon as you can on 999.

DO NOT DISPENSE

You should not dispense the medication but keep the prescription – be careful not to give the person a chance to snatch it back! If you are concerned that the script may be snatched back, add 'presented at xxx pharmacy on xx/xx/xx' at the top of the prescription.

STALL FOR TIME

Inform the patient that you can't dispense the prescription immediately, and ask them to either wait or return later (if possible, ask them to say when they will return). Delaying tactics to try include lack of stock, lunchtime closure, backlog of work or that you need to speak to the prescriber.

CHECK WITH THE PRESCRIBER

Telephone the prescriber to confirm whether the prescription has been altered or forged. Use a published telephone number rather than any number given on the suspect prescription unless you are sure it is correct.

CALL THE POLICE

If the person who presented the prescription is waiting in the pharmacy, or is expected to return shortly, call the police on 999, explain the situation and ask them to attend immediately. If it is not known when the person may return, or they are to return another day, telephone the police on 101 and report the crime. In either case, obtain a crime reference number from the police.

GET ASSISTANCE

If your pharmacy is part of a larger store which has security staff, arrange for a member of security staff to come to the pharmacy if not then ask another member of staff (straight away, if the person is waiting, or in advance of the time that the person is expected to return)

IF THE PATIENT COMES BACK LATER

If the patient returns later, if possible, ask them to wait (using the delaying tactics above) and contact the police on 999 as above. If that is not possible, say that you are unable to dispense the prescription because you believe it may not be genuine / may have been altered, and that the police have been informed. If nothing else, this will hopefully deter them from attempting to use any other stolen prescriptions they may have

TELL NHS ENGLAND

If you have any suspicions or concerns about prescription forms being fraudulently used, you should report this to the NHSCFA. You can call our free, 24hour reporting line [0800 028 4060](tel:08000284060) or report online at <https://cfa.nhs.uk/report-fraud>. All reports are treated in confidence and you have the option to report anonymously. Only fraud related incidents concerning prescription forms should be reported to the NHSCFA. See [here](#) for more information.

TELL YOUR LCFS

If you have already notified the police, advise your ICB Local Counter Fraud Specialist (LCFS) of the crime reference number and of the name, number and station of the police officer dealing with the case

KEEP A RECORD

Record all the details, including a description of the person, and make a note of any telephone conversations. If there would have been any CCTV footage of the person presenting the prescription or when they returned to the pharmacy later, retain and quarantine this footage so that it can be provided to the Police or your LCFS at a later stage. If the police or your LCFS wish to take the original prescription away as evidence, retain a copy in the pharmacy

ICB LCFS

NHS SUSSEX – See [here](#) for more information

NHS SURREYHEARTLANDS – See [here](#) for more information (page 24)

NHS FRIMLEY – See [here](#) for more information (page 17)