

Anonymised Contractor Dispensing Data

About Anonymised Contractor Dispensing Data

This information has been sourced from the Family Practitioner Services within the HSC Business Service Organisation. The information comes from the Family Practitioner Services Pharmacy Payment System. The data provided covers prescriptions that are prescribed in Northern Ireland by a GP, nurse or any other non-medical prescribers (for example: pharmacists, optometrists) attached to a GP Practice that are subsequently dispensed and submitted to BSO for payment by a contractor.

Data relating to out of hours surgeries and hospices is excluded. Data on secondary care prescribing and private prescriptions are not held by the Business Services Organisation.

If a patient does not take a prescription to a dispenser and get it provided to them, then the information will not be included in the dataset. Post payment adjustments are included meaning that small differences in the data may be found, depending on when the data is extracted.

For each contractor in Northern Ireland, and for each medicine (by presentation), dressing and appliance, the following information is provided:

- The number of prescribed items that are dispensed,
- The quantity of tablets, capsules, liquid et cetera dispensed,
- The gross cost.

Contractor Information

All registered contractors in Northern Ireland are included in this data where (in the relevant month) a prescription has been dispensed and submitted by them to the BSO as a claim for payment.

Anonymised Contractor Dispensing data is provided at contractor level, and includes items prescribed by all GPs and other prescribers attached to a GP practice and consequently dispensed. GP practice information is not included in this dataset but can be found [here](#).

From month to month, contractors may close and new contractors may open. For this reason, the number of contractors may vary from one dataset to the next.

In this dataset, drugs are grouped by dispensing contractor and each contractor in the Anonymised Contractor Dispensing data file is identified by an anonymised code. This anonymised cipher changes for each month supplied in the dataset to protect commercial information relating to individual contractors.

Understanding the Data

The presentation level dispensing data for each month contains the following items:

- Year
- Month
- AnonCipher (Random contractor cipher allocation changed on a monthly basis)
- VMP_NM (Generic Name)
- AMP_NM (Branded / Generic Name)
- Presentation
- Strength
- British National Formulary (BNF) code (15 characters)
- Total Items
- Total Quantity
- Total Gross Cost (£)

The **BNF** is a joint publication by the British Medical Association and the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, providing information on the selection, prescribing, dispensing and administration of medicines available in the UK. Medicines are classified by therapeutic group within the BNF. For example: gastro-intestinal, cardiovascular, respiratory, etc.

A **prescription item** is a single supply of a medicine, dressing or appliance written on a prescription form. For example, if a prescription form includes 3 medicines it is counted as 3 prescription items. Item figures do not provide any indication of the length of treatment or quantity of medicine prescribed.

The **quantity** of a drug dispensed is measured in units depending on the formulation of the product. For example, where the formulation is a liquid, the quantity will be the number of millilitres. Where the formulation is a solid form (for example cream, gel, ointment), the quantity will be in grams. Quantities should not be added together across preparations because of different strengths and formulations.

The **Gross Cost** is the basic price of a drug, i.e. the price listed in the National Drug Tariff, concessionary price list, or in standard price lists. Please note concessionary prices have to be approved by the Department of Health (DoH). Where DoH instructs BSO to apply reimbursement prices for a particular month after payment has already been made, these are paid as an adjustment and these prices are known as late concessionary prices. Prior to May 2024 late concessionary prices were not included in the data. From May 2024 the dataset has been amended to include late concessionary price updates.

The BSO information system (the source of this data) uses the therapeutic classifications defined in the BNF for chapters 1 – 15 and related sub-classifications. BSO has created 'pseudo BNF chapters' for items not included in BNF chapters 1 to 15. These are as follows:

- Chapter 18 – Preparations used in diagnosis
- Chapter 19 – Other drugs and preparations
- Chapter 20 – Dressings

Chapter 21 – Appliances
Chapter 22 – Incontinence appliances
Chapter 23 – Stoma appliances, and
Chapter 99 – Unclassified

There may be instances where certain generic products will appear more than once for any given contractor with the same BNF code attached. This is a result of the DM+D database model, which is used in producing the outputs, having separate records that identify specific manufacturers / suppliers. Any analysis of generic products should therefore be performed on VMP_NM or BNF Code, and not AMP_NM.

For more information on DM+D coding, please see the DM+D website:
<https://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/pharmacies-gp-practices-and-appliance-contractors/dictionary-medicines-and-devices-dmd>

Contractor Dispensing in England, Scotland and Wales

The Anonymised Contractor Dispensing data currently being released from data held by the BSO, covers only practices in Northern Ireland. Information on data available for England, Scotland and Wales can be found at the following websites:

[Dispensing contractors' data | NHSBSA](#)

[Community Pharmacy - Contractor Activity - Datasets - Scottish Health and Social Care Open Data \(nhs.scot\)](#)

[Dispensing Contractor Activity by Service - NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership](#)

If statistics are to be used for comparative purposes to other parts of the UK, differences in prescription dispensing and processing in Northern Ireland compared to other UK regions should be noted. For example, in Northern Ireland there is no outpatient dispensing.

Using the Data

Anonymised Contractor Dispensing data requires careful interpretation. A broad range of factors influence the clinical need for a medicine and the decisions about which medicine is the most appropriate choice for an individual patient. This information should therefore not be looked at in isolation or be used to make judgements on the quality of prescribing.

Drug information down to presentation level is released as part of this dataset, but no patient information is contained in the data. It is not therefore possible to identify individual patients. For example, if only one patient is dispensed a certain drug from a particular contractor then the number of items prescribed and the cost for that medicine, which is already available in the public domain, will be in this dataset but it will not show which patient received it.

Prescriptions given to patients tell the pharmacist what medicines to dispense for that patient, but do not contain any information on why the prescription was given to the patient, such as the clinical condition of the patient. BSO dispensing data does not capture the indication for which the drug has been prescribed or dispensed.