



Press Release

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**SOUTH DEVON AND TORBAY CCG'S CUTS TO GLUTEN-FREE PRESCRIPTIONS
WITHOUT PATIENT CONSULTATION COULD COST THE NHS MORE IN THE
LONG RUN**

Coeliac UK is strongly opposing the cuts to gluten-free prescriptions for all over 18 year olds introduced, without consultation with patients, by the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) in South Devon and Torbay.

The charity is concerned these cuts will leave vulnerable patients with coeliac disease without support which will affect their ability to stick to the gluten-free diet. The potential serious long term health complications of not maintaining a gluten-free diet include osteoporosis, infertility and, in some rare cases, small bowel cancer, conditions that could cost the NHS a lot more in the long run.

In December 2015, South Devon and Torbay CCG changed their policy to restrict the gluten-free products available on prescription to just three brands of bread, flour mix and pasta. It has now decided to remove access to gluten-free food on prescription for anyone with coeliac disease over the age of 18, Coeliac UK believe that in this instance the CCG has failed in its legal duty to promote the involvement of patients and has disregarded best practice guidance provided by NHS England.

Coeliac disease is a serious autoimmune condition caused by a reaction to gluten, a protein found in wheat, barley and rye. Gluten-free food such as bread which is a staple in the diet is three to four times more expensive* than gluten-containing counterparts and availability is limited in rural areas and small stores. Having access to gluten-free staple foods on prescription provides an essential level of support to individuals trying to keep to the gluten-free diet which is the only treatment for coeliac disease.

The National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE) estimates that the cost of gluten-free food to the NHS equates to £194.24 per diagnosed patient per year, making it an extremely low cost treatment. In March 2015, before the initial cuts in December had been implemented, NHS South Devon and Torbay CCG spent a total of £184,400 on gluten-free foods for both adults and children.

Sarah Sleet, chief executive of Coeliac UK, the national charity for people with coeliac disease said: “The decision by South Devon and Torbay CCG to remove gluten-free prescription services for everyone with coeliac disease over the age of 18 and introducing a restriction on the quantity and type of items available to those under 18, regardless of circumstances, is being based on budgets rather than patient need. The patients affected by this policy change haven’t been consulted so how can the CCG have considered the potential long term damage to health by removing this vital service?”

In England, prescriptions for gluten-free food are not free of charge unless someone already qualifies for free prescriptions. Currently 65% of CCGs across the country adhere to National Prescribing Guidelines, providing recommendations for GPs and policymakers on reasonable amounts of gluten-free staple foods such as bread, flour and pasta per patient per month.

“For someone medically diagnosed with coeliac disease there is no choice but to stick to a gluten-free diet, day in day out for life and so access to gluten-free staples is critical, and not as easy as you might think. The expansion of Free From aisles in large supermarkets masks the reality of very patchy provision. In particular, small stores and budget supermarkets have little, if any, gluten-free staples. Additionally, high prices make such products unaffordable for some. Both these issues put those the most in need at risk – those on a limited budget or with limited mobility,” continued Ms Sleet.

Ends

Notes to editor

- Coeliac disease is a serious illness where the body’s immune system reacts to gluten found in food, making the body attack itself.
- 1 in 100 people in the UK has coeliac disease
- A wide range of case studies are available on request from Coeliac UK.
- Average time to diagnosis is 13 years.
- 1 in 4 people diagnosed with coeliac disease had previously been diagnosed with IBS.
- Gluten is a protein found in wheat (including spelt), rye and barley. Some people are also sensitive to oats. Obvious sources of gluten include breads, pastas, flours, cereals, cakes and biscuits. It is often used as an ingredient in many favourite foods such as fish fingers, sausages, gravies, sauces and soy sauce.
- Coeliac UK has a Helpline on 0333 332 2033 and further information can be found at www.coeliac.org.uk

* Comparative costs for gluten-free bread and gluten containing bread as of 20 April 2016

Gluten-free loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco-free from white sliced (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Tesco-free from fresh bread	£0.36	£2.00

(550g) (white or brown)		
Asda free from white sliced bread (400g)	£0.38	£1.50
Asda free from brown sliced bread (550g)	£0.27	£1.50
Sainsbury's free from sliced (400g) white or brown	£0.50	£2.00
Waitrose gluten-free bread (400g) white or brown	£0.57	£2.29

Compared to gluten containing

Gluten containing loaf	Price per 100g	Price per loaf
Tesco everyday value bread (800g) (white or brown)	£0.05	£0.40
Tesco bread (800g) (white or bread)	£0.06	£0.50
Asda Baker's Selection (800g) white or brown	£0.05	£0.36
Asda chosen by you (800g) white or brown	£0.07	£0.55
Sainsbury's basics bread (800g) white or brown	£0.05	£0.40
Sainsbury's bread (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose essential (800g) white or brown	£0.06	£0.45
Waitrose bread (800g) white or wholegrain	£0.17	£1.34

Note: for Morrison customers there is not an own brand gluten-free version. Genius bread (gluten-free) is available at £2.83 for a 535g loaf (£0.53 per 100g) or Warburtons gluten-free is available at £3.00 for a 560g loaf (£0.54 per 100g)