

Consultation on proposal to make Gina 10 microgram vaginal tablets (Estradiol) available from pharmacies

Healthwatch Birmingham welcomes the opportunity to respond to Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory agency's (MHRA) consultation on *Consultation on proposal to make Gina 10 microgram vaginal tablets (Estradiol) available from pharmacies*. Our key role is to make sure that patients, the public, service users, and carers (PPSuC) are at the heart of service improvement in health and social care. In line with our role, we have focused our comments on:

- Patient and Public Involvement and engagement
- Whether the proposal is responsive to the needs of Birmingham residents

Healthwatch Birmingham notes that the consultation has only been open for three weeks. This short period means that less people will have been aware of the consultation or had time to respond. We also note that the consultation has not been offered in any other format, such as easy read or community languages, excluding those with language or sensory impairment needs from taking part. There is not a phone number or postal address to allow anyone without digital access to easily respond.

The consultation questionnaire does not ask for demographic details of respondents. This means that MHRA has no way of knowing that responses are representative of all communities in the country. As Birmingham is a diverse multicultural city we want to ensure that proposals are suitable for all people in Birmingham, and that any potential concerns or barriers faced by any community are properly considered before implementing any proposal.

Proposal

Healthwatch Birmingham support treatments being more accessible to the public where appropriate, especially given the known issues with accessing GP appointments currently. As we note though the population of Birmingham is very diverse, and it is important that pathways for accessing treatments are suitable for as many people as possible. Part of this is making sure feedback about accessing this particular treatment is collected and reviewed to identify any problems or barriers that people may be facing.

We have previously heard from the public in Birmingham about their concerns with the skills and experience of pharmacists as this service user indicated *"they don't give you appointments with GP, to my surprise they send you to healthcare assistant or community pharmacist for minor health issues. Which is rubbish they don't know anything and its waste of time & effort"*. We have also heard positive experiences from people who trust in the skills of pharmacists:



"Staff are very friendly pharmacy are very knowledgeable I always talk to pharmacist before GP. Staff do seem stressed at times due to poor management on rota I think as there needs to be more staff on pharmacy".

"I have used this Pharmacy for a number of years. I have regular reviews of my medication with the Pharmacists. I can always ask questions about my medication and get advice easily".

"The pharmacist is professional and is interactive with customers which stood out".

It will be important to communicate clearly the skill and experience of pharmacists who dispense this treatment, and that they can still access the treatment via prescription from a doctor if needed.

Privacy when consulting with the pharmacist will be especially important due to the nature of the treatment. Cultural considerations will need to be made by pharmacists about how to consult with their local populations appropriately, to avoid any inequalities of access.

The expense of paying for a treatment directly from a pharmacy will also be a concern for many people, especially those living in more deprived areas of our city. We have previously heard from women who have struggled to pay the prescription costs for accessing treatments like HRT.

"[M]onthly prescriptions of HRT very expensive when I have had to reduce my hours due to the menopause!"

"I am on HRT now monthly and on a low income now."

It is important that it is clear to women the choices they have for accessing different methods of treatment, including if they need to apply for financial support for prescription costs. We believe making this choice clear, and giving people an appropriate route to feedback about the treatment pathway will strengthen the proposal and ways that people have of accessing care in Birmingham.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kalebe".

Chipiliro Kalebe-Nyamongo
Research and Policy Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah".

Sarah Walmsley
Data and Insight Officer

