

Adding price tag to medicine packs just 'headline grabbing gimmick'

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Adding the price tag to prescription medicines worth more than £20 in England is just a "headline grabbing gimmick," which, among other things, could potentially mislead patients into believing that cheaper drugs are somehow less important, says an editorial in *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin (DTB)*.

On 1 July this year, [health secretary](#) for England Jeremy Hunt announced plans to print the indicative cost of medicines on all packs of those worth more than £20 alongside the phrase "funded by the UK taxpayer."

The initiative aims to encourage more people to take personal responsibility for the use of finite public resources, added to which the health secretary claimed that the move would help cut waste and improve [patient care](#) as more people would be inclined to take their meds.

But *DTB* is unconvinced. There is no evidence to back the move, nor does such a strategy feature in any national or international guidance on ways of making sure people stick to their prescribed drug regimen, it says.

Sticking to a prescribed course of drugs can be difficult even for those who pay for their prescriptions, it says, adding that the approach could have several unintended consequences.

These include worrying elderly or vulnerable patients, such as the

mentally ill, who may see themselves as a burden on society and consequently not take their medication, or leading people to view cheaper drugs as less important, says the editorial.

Last year, the average cost of medicines dispensed in England was £8.32, with drugs costing under £20 comprising a far higher volume than those costing more than £20, it says.

"Although there is no link between the NHS price of a medicine and its clinical efficacy, we believe that there is a risk that the price might be misinterpreted as an indicator of the medicine's value," says the editorial.

"A patient taking a number of drugs may gain a biased understanding of their treatment, with inexpensive drugs used for heart disease being considered less important than a high cost drug used to treat pain," it continues.

Furthermore, the price of a [drug](#) may not represent the true cost to the NHS, because some cheap drugs are expensive in terms of the monitoring and follow up they require, the editorial points out.

There are practical considerations, as well, says *DTB*, including who is going to foot the cost of the changes required to the packaging. And many containers are already small, making it hard to include the mandatory dosing information and warnings, let alone anything else, it says.

Further crowding of the container with extra words could make other far more important information less clear, and potentially lead to mistakes being made, it suggests.

Improving a patient's willingness/ability to stay the course of treatment requires some investment, in terms of the time needed to have an

informed two way discussion with the patient, and this may ultimately be far more useful than simply including the [price tag](#) on the container, says *DTB*.

"The most expensive drugs are the ones dispensed but never used, and it is not clear that this headline grabbing gimmick will do anything to improve adherence," it concludes.

More information: It's not just about the money, money, money, *Drug and Therapeutics Bulletin*,
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