Summary

There is evidence that the use of leaflets or booklets outlining the natural history of respiratory tract infections (and information about when to reconsult) can result in reduced antibiotic prescribing. Therefore the Antibiotic Information Leaflet can be used as a tool to interact with patients and educate them about using antibiotics responsibly, rather than just handing it to them as a ‘parting gift’ in order to reduce inappropriate antibiotic prescribing.

Why create the leaflet, is there a problem?

As a prescriber, you will be more than aware that most respiratory tract infections (RTIs) are self-limiting illnesses. So why is the most common problem seen by prescribers often described as a frustrating experience? And why do patients¹ often report feeling “fobbed off”, and leave these consultations feeling dissatisfied?

Antibiotic use is certainly a part of it. Prescribers often feel caught between pressure of not to prescribe and expectations from patients¹ to prescribe. However, there is evidence that prescribers often overestimate patients¹ expectations for antibiotics, and that many patients¹, when they are fully informed about the modest benefits and potential harms from treatment, would rather not receive antibiotics.

Antibiotic resistance has been recognised as a major public health concern by the World Health Organisation and the UK government. It has been estimated that 80% of all antibiotics are prescribed in the community, and that 50% of these are probably unnecessary. In the UK, this has led the government’s Advisory Group on Antimicrobial Resistance and Healthcare Associated Infections (ARHAI) to encourage initiatives that increase responsible antibiotic prescribing in primary care as a key component in the battle against resistance.

The issue of antimicrobial resistance is not just a societal problem or a problem for future generations. Research has shown that patients who have recently had an antibiotic prescription are twice as likely to have an RTI or urinary tract infection (UTI), due to resistant organisms. Infections due to resistant organisms are now common in primary care, are symptomatic for longer and increase primary care workload.

What can be done about it?

Research has shown that patient¹ satisfaction is more related to having a careful examination and having their concerns identified and addressed than to receiving a prescription for antibiotics. This provides us with a great opportunity, and many prescribers are already very good at providing patients¹ with information and reassuring them.

We know how busy prescribers are, and how important it is to use precious consultation time efficiently. In order to address the whole range of information needs that patients¹ might have, within a busy consultation, clinicians need to have a range of ‘tools’ at their disposal.

¹ Throughout this document the term ‘patient’ will be used to describe both patients consulting about their own illness and parents consulting about an illness in their child.
The use of leaflets

There is evidence that the use of leaflets or booklets outlining the natural history of respiratory tract infections (and information about when to reconsult) can result in reduced antibiotic prescribing. Reductions in antibiotic prescribing have been shown to result in reductions in future demand for consultations. So it is worth investing a bit of time in these consultations in order to reap future benefits.

Most prescribers have access to a variety of paper and/or electronic information leaflets, however, not all are based on the best available evidence or have been developed through rigorous processes. The Antibiotic Information Leaflet has been developed via a thorough process of literature searching, consultation, drafting, and revision.

Overview of the leaflet

To use this leaflet properly, it is important that it is used as a tool to interact with patients¹, rather than as a ‘parting gift’. In order to do this effectively you must make sure that you are very familiar with its content. Please make sure that, in addition to completing this training, you take some time to thoroughly familiarise yourself with the leaflet before you start using it.

The leaflet has three main sections:

1. **Patient details and prescribing decision**
   
   This section is to be completed by the prescriber in order to personalise the leaflet to the patient in question. The patient’s name can be added, and the relevant boxes ticked to explain what decision has been made in the consultation.

2. **Why did you not get antibiotics today?**
   
   Use this section to provide a simple explanation of why antibiotics were not prescribed.
   
   The table provides tick boxes to use to explain to the patient¹ what illness they are currently suffering from, how long their illness is likely to last (based on NICE evidence). The *other* section at the bottom table can be used to note any illnesses that are not included within the table.

   The “what can you do to ease symptoms” and “when should you (or your child) go back to your GP practice or contact NHS Direct?” section should be explained to the patient¹.

3. **Why you should only take antibiotics when they are needed**
   
   This section provides information to patients¹ regarding the importance of appropriate and responsible antibiotic use. This can be explained during the consultation or referred to for the patient¹ to read once the consultation is complete.

We are happy to receive feedback about how you have used this leaflet and any constructive comments on how it can be improved. Please contact Dr Cliodna McNulty via email at cliodna.mcnulty@phe.gov.uk

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¹ Please familiarise yourself with the patient's needs and medical history before using the leaflet.