



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Primary care prescriptions: April 2022 to March 2023

This release provides statistics on items prescribed by primary care practitioners in Wales and dispensed in the community (usually in community pharmacies) in the UK for April 2022 to March 2023.

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Introduction

The large majority of items are prescribed through general practices (mostly but not exclusively by GPs) and statistics are mainly focussed on these items.

A new section on items prescribed by dental practitioners, pharmacists and optometrists in Wales, working outside of general practices is also included.

For consistent comparisons between UK countries, analysis should be done using a slightly different measure, 'prescriptions dispensed in the community'. This measure counts all prescriptions dispensed in community pharmacies, based on the location of the pharmacy rather than the prescriber. A comparison of general practice prescriptions and prescriptions dispensed in the community is provided in [Table 1](#) and further details are provided in the [Which data should I use? section](#).

'Items' refer to each different medicine or appliance listed on a prescription regardless of quantity or volume. Only items which are dispensed are counted.

Items prescribed and dispensed within hospitals are not counted in either dataset, but if a prescription was issued by a hospital doctor and later dispensed at a community pharmacy, it would be counted in the secondary source of prescriptions dispensed in the community.

Main points

- Just fewer than 84.5 million items were prescribed by all primary care practitioners in Wales and dispensed in the community in 2022-23.
- Of these, 84.2 million items were prescribed through general practices, an increase of 1.3 million (1.6%) items since 2021-22 and the highest number

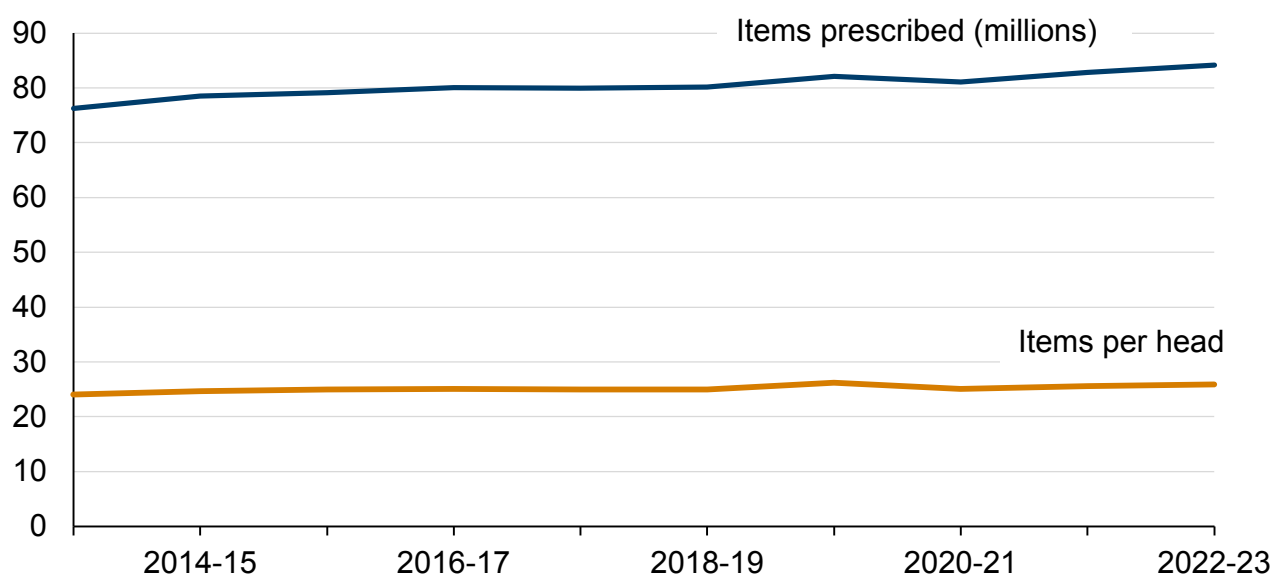
on record.

- 256,000 items were prescribed by dental practitioners, 42,000 items by pharmacists working in community pharmacies, and 16,000 items by optometrists.
- The number of items prescribed and dispensed through general practices has increased steadily over the longer-term; the number of items prescribed increased by 5.0% in the last five years and by 10.4% in the last ten years.
- The number of items prescribed through general practices per head of population registered with a GP was 25.7 in 2022-23. This is 0.9 items more than five years ago and 1.9 items more than ten years ago.
- Almost 60% of items prescribed through general practices in Wales were to treat conditions affecting either the cardiovascular system, central nervous system, or endocrine system.
- Total net ingredient cost of items prescribed through general practices increased by 7.4% compared with the previous year, the largest annual increase since 2003-04. The cost per head of population registered with a GP in Wales increased by £13.75.
- There is variation between the number of items prescribed and dispensed at health board level. The number of items prescribed and dispensed per **prescribing unit** in Cardiff and Vale was 25.9% fewer than in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.
- More items were prescribed and dispensed to patients living in more deprived areas than in less deprived areas; 1.8 (or 6.6%) more items were prescribed per head of population in the two most deprived quintiles compared to the least two deprived quintiles.
- The net ingredient costs per item prescribed varied slightly by deprivation quintile, with cost per item 20p lower in the most deprived quintile than in the second least deprived quintile, the largest difference between all quintiles.
- More prescription items per head of population were dispensed in Wales than any of the other UK countries. However, a greater proportion of items dispensed in Wales were of relatively low cost, as Wales had the lowest net ingredient cost per prescription item dispensed of all four countries.

General Practice prescriptions

Statistics in this section are based on items prescribed by practitioners working in general practices in Wales. This includes all items prescribed by GPs as well as nurses, pharmacists and other authorised prescribers that are employed directly in general practices. It does not include items prescribed by any practitioners working outside of general practices.

Figure 1: Prescription items issued through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community, 2013-14 to 2022-23



Description of Figure 1: Chart showing the number of items prescribed and dispensed has increased steadily over the last ten years. The number of items prescribed per head has also increased.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

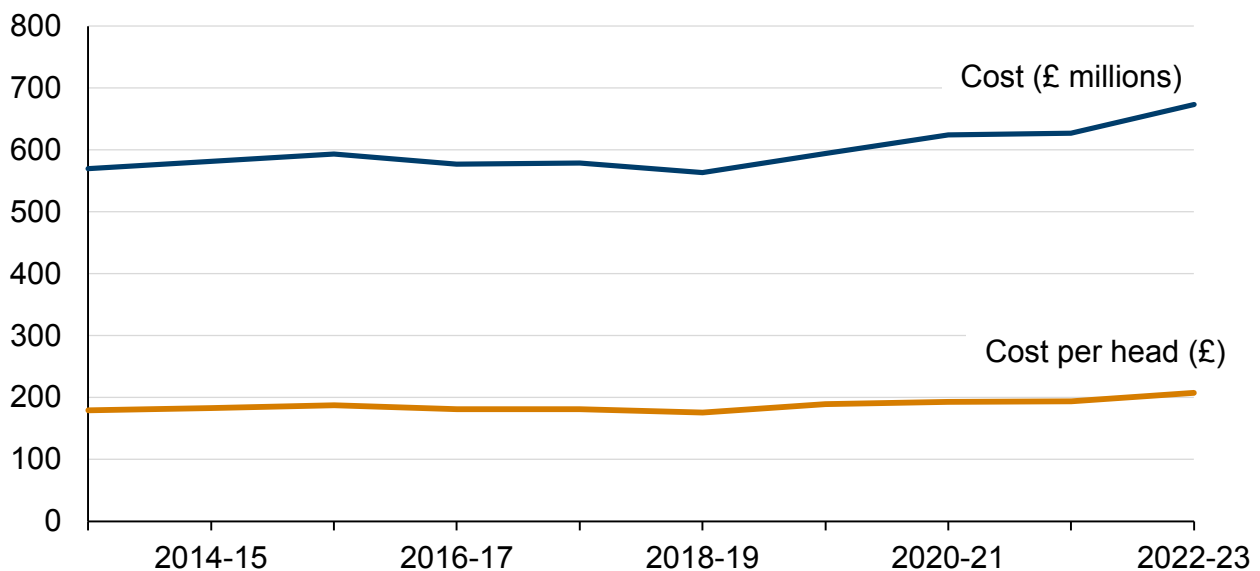
Prescriptions summary data by year on StatsWales

In 2022-23 there were 84.2 million items prescribed through general practices in Wales and dispensed in community pharmacies, the highest on record. This is equivalent to 25.9 items per head of the population registered with a GP in Wales.

Just over 1.3 million more items were prescribed and dispensed in the community in 2022-23 compared to 2021-22, an increase of 1.6%. This is an increase of 0.3 items per head of the population registered with a GP in Wales.

The longer-term trend shows a broadly steady increase in the number of items prescribed and dispensed; the number of items increased by 5.0% in the last five years and by 10.4% in the last ten years. Similarly, the number of items prescribed and dispensed per head increased by 0.9 in the last five years and by 1.9 in the last ten years.

Figure 2: Net ingredient cost of items prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed in the community, 2013-14 to 2022-23 [Note1]



Description of Figure 2: Chart showing that the net ingredient cost of all items prescribed through general practices and dispensed in the community has been on an upward trend over the last five years. The net ingredient cost per head has increased at a similar rate.

[Note 1] Net ingredient costs for all years are not adjusted for inflation. Standard adjustments for inflation are not considered appropriate as drug prices are subject to controls under the Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme and to other central controls.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Prescriptions summary data by year on StatsWales

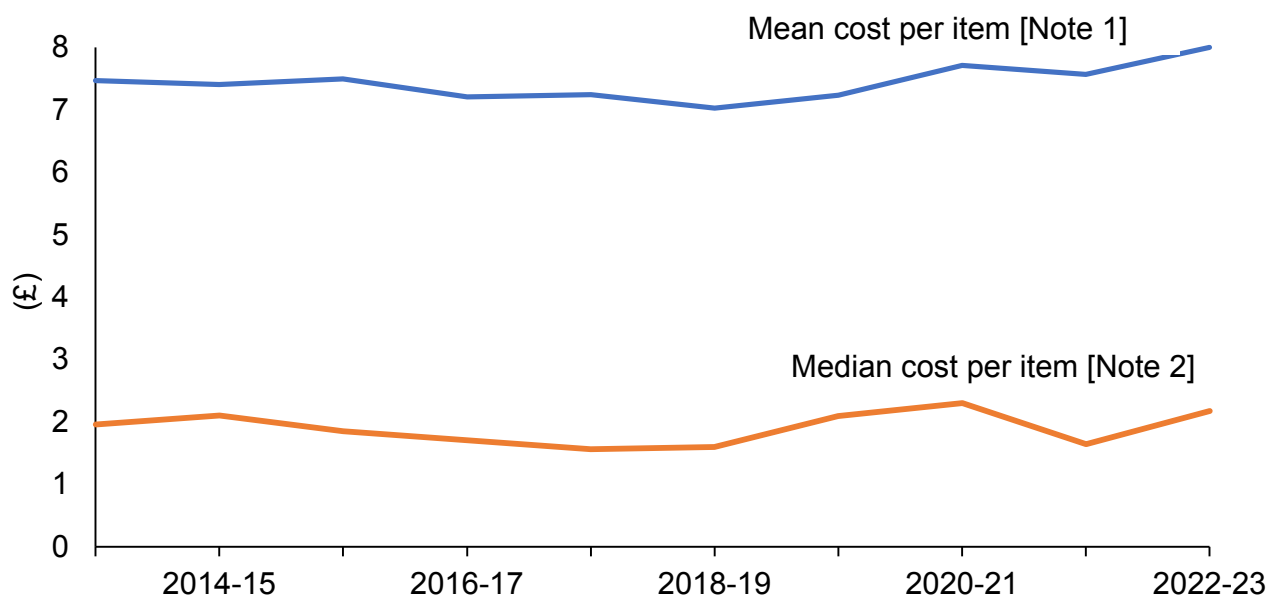
In 2022-23, the total net ingredient cost of all items prescribed through general

practices in Wales and dispensed in the community was almost £673 million, equivalent to £207.39 per head of population registered with a GP in Wales.

Total net ingredient costs increased by just more than £46 million or 7.4% compared with the previous year. The cost per head of population registered with a GP in Wales increased by £13.75.

In the three years before 2018-19, the total net ingredient cost had been on a slight downward trend, but it has increased in every year since. The net ingredient cost has increased by 19.5% in the last five years but by 18.2% in the last ten years. The cost of items prescribed and dispensed per head increased by £31.70 in the last five years but by £27.93 in the last ten years.

Figure 3: Average net ingredient costs per item prescribed through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community, 2013-14 to 2022-23



Description of Figure 3: Chart showing that the mean cost per item prescribed

through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community has varied year-to-year but has remained close to £7.40 in most years since 2013-14. Similarly, the median cost per item has varied each year but has remained close to £1.90.

[Note 1] Mean cost per item refers to items prescribed in the full financial year.

[Note 2] Median cost per item, refers to items prescribed in the March of each year only. Data for a single month is used for practical purposes given the volume of prescription items issued. The median may vary for other months during the year.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

In 2022-23, the **mean** net ingredient cost per item was £8.00. This is £0.43 higher than in 2021-22 and £0.53 higher than ten years ago.

The **median** cost per item in March 2023 was £2.17. This is £0.53 in March 2022 and £0.21 higher than ten years ago.

The median cost per item is much smaller than the mean cost per item as there are a relatively low number of items with a very high net ingredient cost. These high-cost items will have a greater impact on the mean than the median. The median is more appropriate to use for the cost of more 'common' prescription items.

British National Formulary (BNF) chapters

The **British National Formulary (BNF) (Pharmaceutical Press)** is a pharmaceutical reference book containing information and advice on prescribing. It groups all medications into categories and 'chapters' are the

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highest-level categories.

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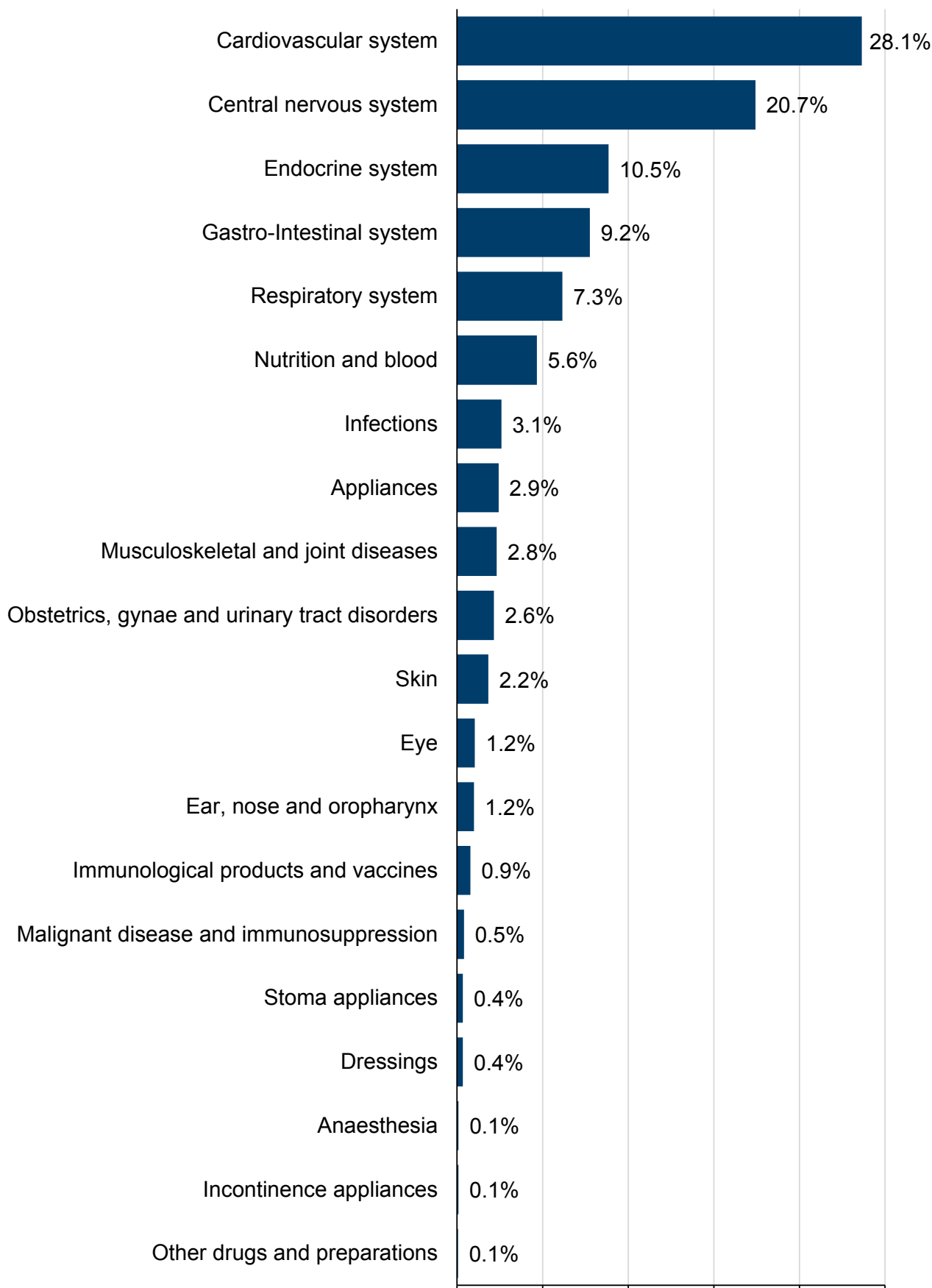
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Figure 4: Number of items and percentage of total items prescribed through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community, by British National Formulary (BNF) chapter, 2022-23

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Description of Figure 4: Bar chart showing wide variation in the number and percentage of items prescribed between the 20 BNF chapters. Three quarters of all items prescribed were in five chapters: cardiovascular system; central nervous system; endocrine system; gastro-intestinal system; and respiratory system.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Prescription items and cost by area and BNF chapter - time series on StatsWales

Nearly half (48.8%) of all items prescribed and dispensed were to treat the cardiovascular or central nervous systems.

The BNF chapter with the most items prescribed was the cardiovascular system. In 2022-23, 23.6 million items (28.1% of all items) were prescribed and dispensed for treatment of the cardiovascular system, equal to 7.3 items per head of population registered with a GP in Wales.

17.4 million items (20.7% of all items) were prescribed and dispensed for the treatment of the central nervous system, equal to 5.4 items per head of population registered with a GP in Wales.

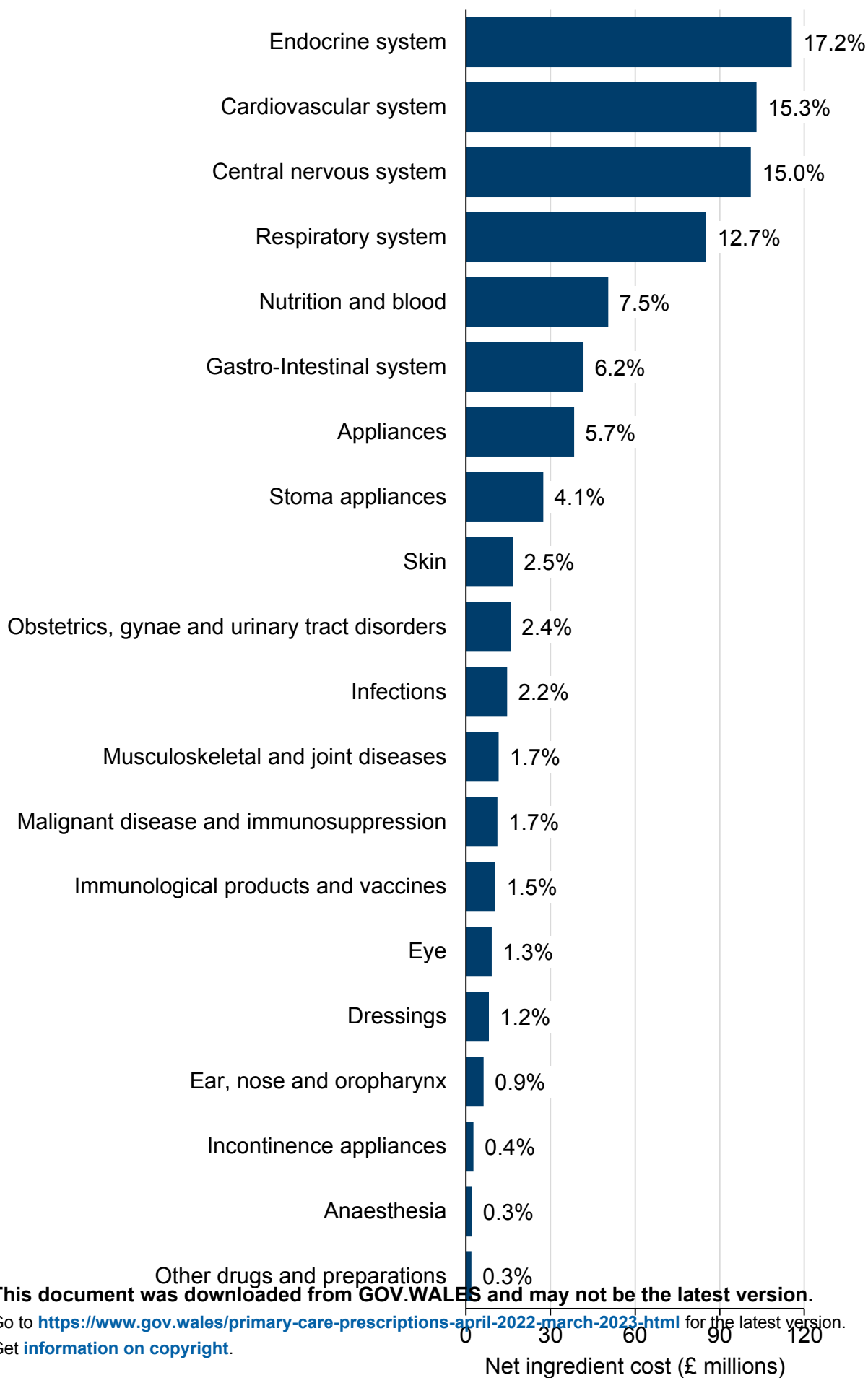
Other BNF chapters with more than 5% of all items prescribed included endocrine system (10.5%); gastro-intestinal system (9.2%); respiratory system (7.3%); and nutrition and blood (5.6%).

Figure 5: Net ingredient costs and percentage of total cost of items prescribed through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community, by British National Formulary (BNF) chapter, 2022-23

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Description of Figure 5: Bar chart showing wide variation in the net ingredient costs of items prescribed between the 20 BNF chapters. Three quarters of the total net ingredient cost were for items prescribed in six chapters: endocrine system; cardiovascular system; central nervous system; respiratory system; nutrition and blood; and gastro-intestinal system.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Prescription items and cost by area and BNF chapter - time series on StatsWales

While nearly half of all items prescribed were for treatments of the cardiovascular and central nervous systems, their combined net ingredient cost was just under a third (30.3%) of the total cost.

The highest net ingredient costs (£116 million) were for endocrine system treatments, which accounted for a sixth (17.2%) of the total cost of all items prescribed.

The BNF chapters with the highest cost per item were stoma appliances (£77.17); malignant diseases (£26.65); and incontinence appliances (£26.56). The classes with the lowest cost per item were cardiovascular system (£4.36); musculoskeletal and joint diseases (£4.96); and gastro-intestinal system (£5.37).

Most common items prescribed

Every item prescribed is categorised by its BNF chapter (for example, central nervous system), section (for example, analgesics); sub-paragraph (for example, non-opioid analgesics and compound preparations) and chemical name (for example, paracetamol). Data for all of these categories are provided on the

prescriptions dashboard.

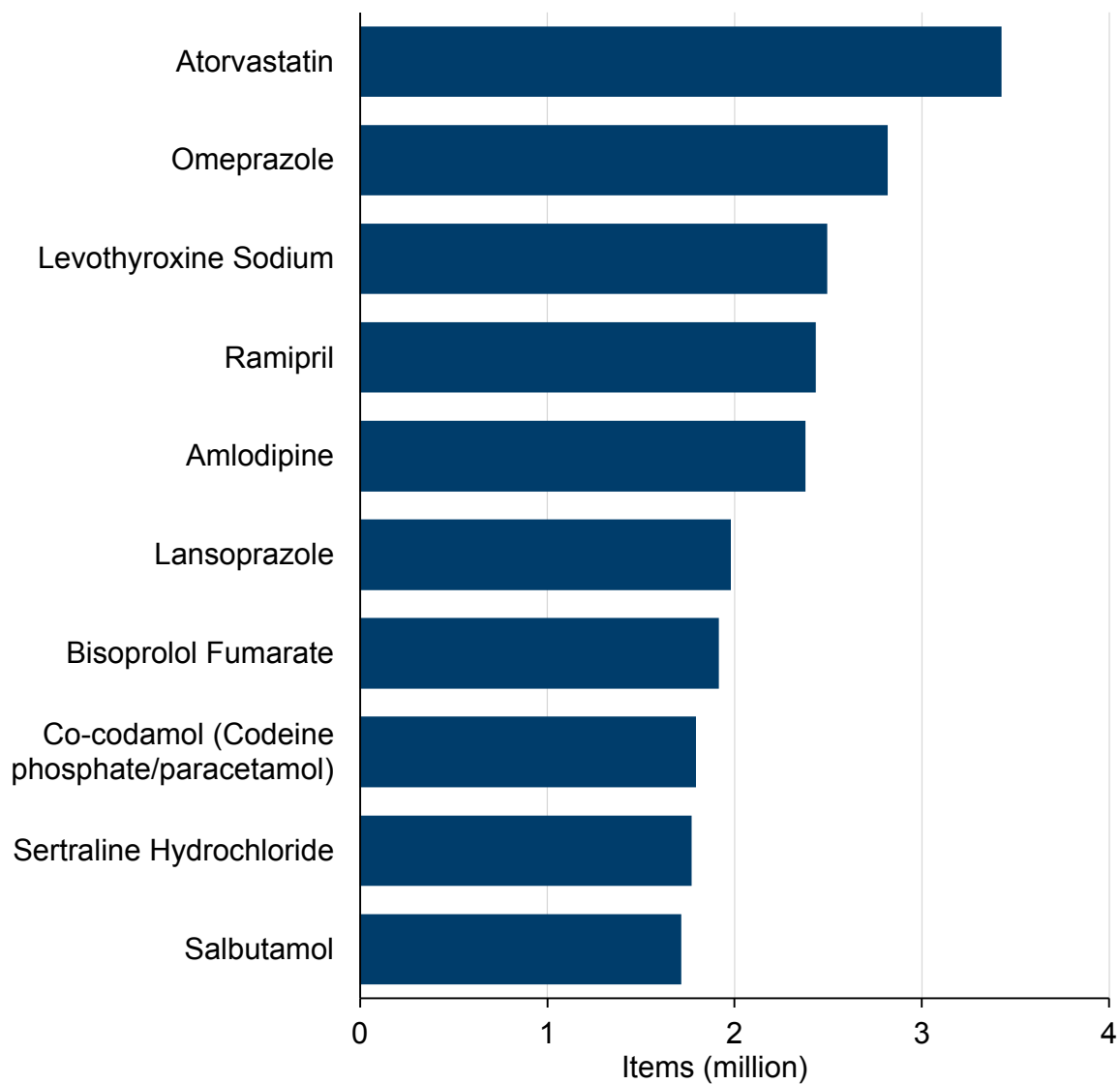
This section focusses on the most common items (chemical names) prescribed through general practices in the latest year.

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Figure 6: The 10 items most commonly prescribed through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community, 2022-23



Description of Figure 6: Bar chart showing the ten most common items varied from Atorvastatin (3.2 million items) to Salbutamol (1.7 million items).

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Prescriptions: individual preparations, 2001-02 to 2022-23 (MS Excel)

Atorvastatin (a lipid-regulating medicine) was prescribed more than 3.2 million times and was the most prescribed item in 2022-23. This is equivalent to one in every 25 items prescribed (4.1%).

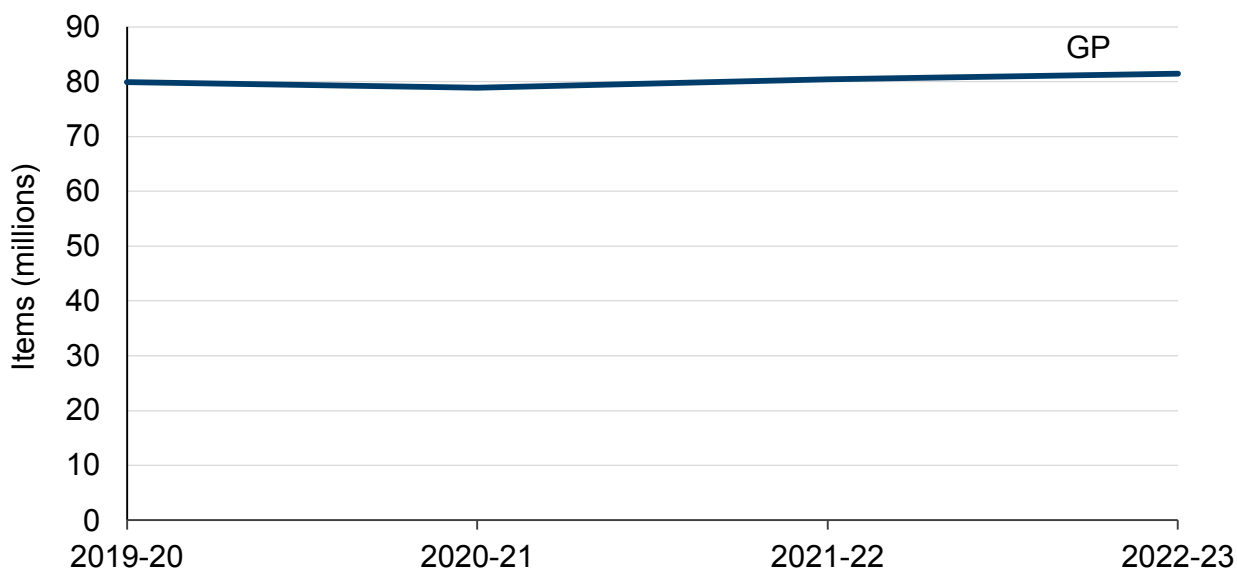
The ten most common items accounted for 27.0% of all items prescribed in 2022-23 and all ten were also the ten most commonly prescribed items in 2021-22.

Prescriptions for seven of the items increased from the previous year, with the largest increases for Atorvastatin (6.6%) and Salbutamol (4.0%). Three items decreased from the previous year, with the largest decreases for Levothyroxine sodium (1.7%) and Omeprazole (0.4%).

Prescriptions by staff in general practices

While most prescriptions will be issued by general practitioners (GPs), some other staff roles employed in general practices are also licensed to prescribe items.

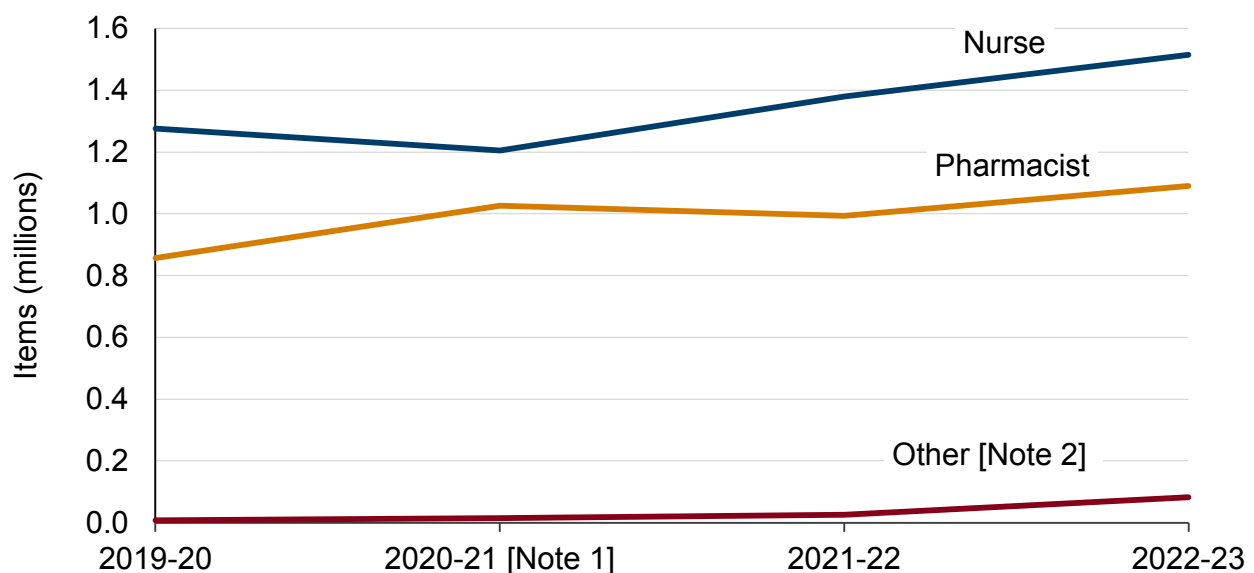
Figure 7: Items prescribed by GPs and dispensed in the community, 2019-20 to 2022-23



Description of Figure 7: Line chart showing that the number of items prescribed by GPs has increased slightly between 2019-20 and 2022-23, with nearly 81.5 million items prescribed by GPs in the latest year.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Figure 8: Items prescribed by wider staff in general practice and dispensed in the community, 2019-20 to 2022-23



Description of Figure 8: Line chart showing that the number of items prescribed by both nurses and pharmacists working in general practices has increased between 2019-20 and 2022-23, with more than 2.5 million items prescribed by staff in these two roles combined in the latest year.

[Note 1] In 2020-21 there were 2,524 items prescribed where the practitioner type was unknown, these are not included in any category on this chart.

[Note 2] Includes paramedics, physiotherapists, and other prescribers providing direct patient care.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Between 2019-20 and 2022-23, the large majority of items prescribed in general

practice were from GPs and the number of items prescribed by GPs has steadily increased over the time period increased. However, the proportion of all items prescribed by GPs has decreased slightly from 97.4% in 2019-20 to 96.8% in 2022-23.

In 2022-23, just more than 1.5 million items were prescribed by nurses and just more than 1.0 million items were prescribed by pharmacists working in general practices.

The percentage of all items prescribed by nurses has increased in every year for which data is available, and in 2022-23, 1.8% of all items prescribed through general practices were prescribed by nurses.

1.3% of all items prescribed through general practices in 2022-23 were prescribed by pharmacists. This percentage has remained stable over the last 3 years.

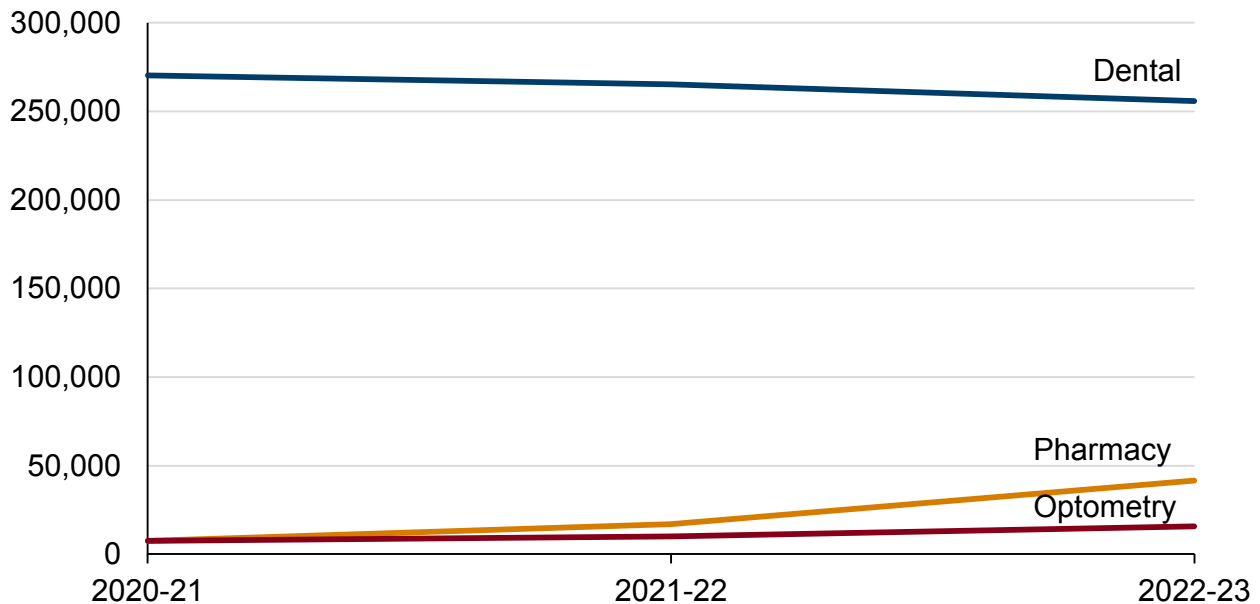
Just over 83,000 items were prescribed by other staff in general practice which includes direct patient care practitioners such as paramedics and physiotherapists.

Items prescribed by other primary care practitioners

Prescriptions can be issued by other primary care practitioners who work in NHS dental practices, community pharmacies and optometry practices. This does not include items prescribed in hospitals or items prescribed through non-NHS providers.

Figure 9: Items prescribed by other primary care

practitioners and dispensed in the community, 2020-21 to 2022-23



Description of Figure 9: Line chart showing that the majority of items prescribed outside of general practices were from NHS dental practitioners. However, the number of items prescribed by dentists decreased slightly between 2020-21 and 2022-23. A smaller but increasing number of items were prescribed by pharmacists and optometrists.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

In 2022-23, just fewer than 255,700 items were prescribed through NHS dental practices, a 3.7% decrease from the previous year.

Just more than 41,500 items were prescribed through community pharmacies, nearly 3 times as many (146.9% increase) as in the previous year.

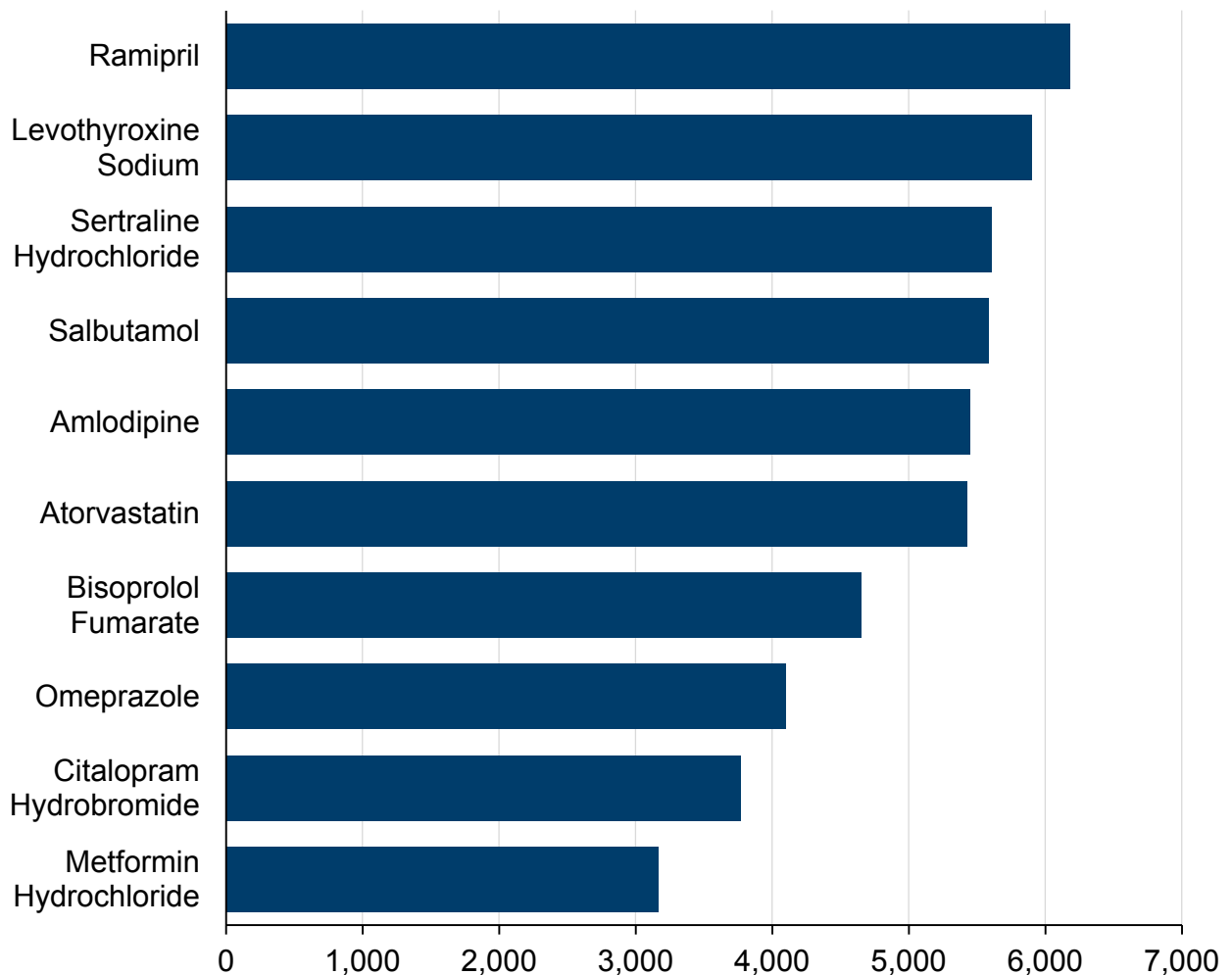
Just more than 15,500 items were prescribed through optometrists, a 55.6% increase from the previous year.

In addition, while not a primary care service, 173 items were prescribed directly through the Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust in 2022-23. While this is a very small number of items compared to other practitioners, 3.5 times more items were prescribed than in the previous year.

Emergency medicine supply

In certain emergency circumstances, such as patients losing medication or patients unexpectedly running out of medication, community pharmacists can provide a limited quantity of medicines without a prescription. These are counted separately to items prescribed directly by community pharmacists and are therefore not counted in Figure 9.

Figure 10: The 10 most common medicines provided through emergency medicine supply, 2022-23



Description of Figure 10: Bar chart showing the top 10 most common items prescribed through the emergency medicine supply scheme in 2022-23 ranged from Ramipril (6,185 items) to Metformin Hydrochloride (3,169 items).

Source: Choose Pharmacy System, Digital Health and Care Wales

In total, 131,337 items were supplied through the emergency medicine supply

arrangements. Just over 650 different items were prescribed and the most common 10 items accounted for 38.0% of the total.

In 2022-23, the medication most commonly dispensed through the emergency medicine supply was Ramipril, a drug used to treat high blood pressure. This was closely followed by Levothyroxine sodium (underactive thyroid), Sertraline hydrochloride (depression / anxiety) and Salbutamol (asthma).

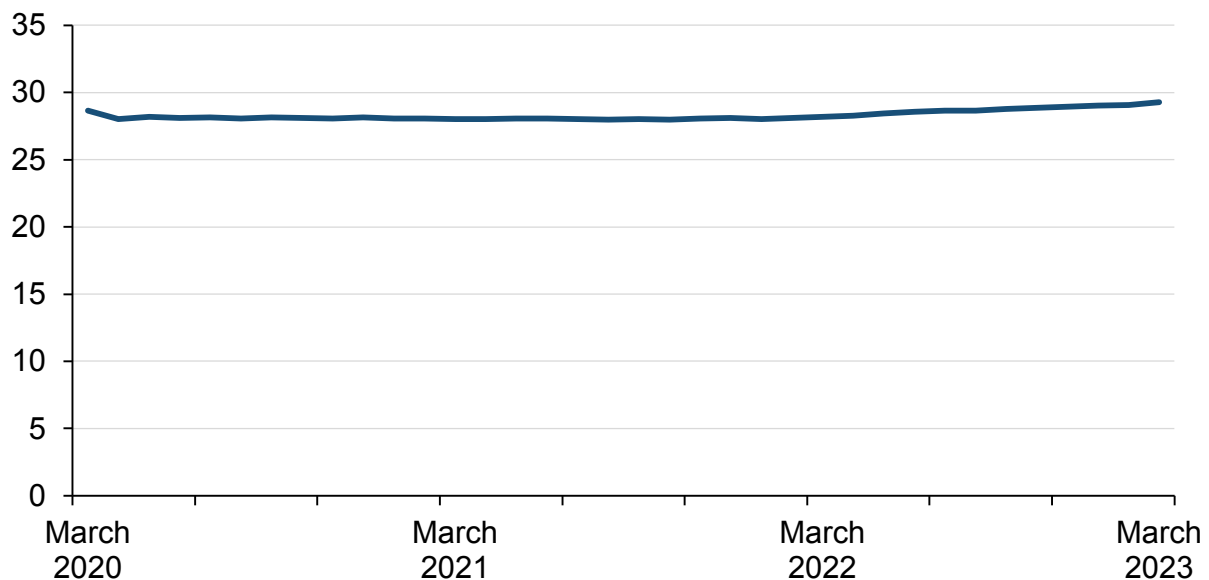
Prescription volumes

In October 2022, the **All Wales Medicines Strategy Group (All Wales Therapeutics and Toxicology Centre)** recommended that patients, general practices and community pharmacies would all benefit from longer prescribing intervals, where clinically appropriate. In practice, if a two-months supply of medication was provided, instead of a one-month supply, patients would still get the same amount of medication but need fewer visits to GPs and pharmacies.

In terms of data, over time this policy change would result in fewer items being prescribed to some patients to treat certain conditions, but the volume of the item prescribed would increase.

As the same items can be prescribed in various forms (liquid/tablets/powder) and in different volumes, it is not possible to measure the volume of items prescribed fairly, across the whole range of items prescribed. However, a sample of 44 medications, known as the '28 day basket' of medications can be used as an approximation of prescription volume. These 44 medications are usually taken as once-daily doses, therefore the total quantity of tablets or capsules divided by the number of times the item is prescribed can give an indication of the average number of days of treatment prescribed.

Figure 11: Average prescription volume for medications in the '28 day basket' medications



Description of Figure 11: Line chart showing that prescription volumes had remained close to 28 doses per prescription between March 2020 and March 2022. However, the trend increased marginally in nearly every month since then and has been greater than 29 since December 2022.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

In March 2023, there was an average of 29.3 doses per prescription in the '28 day basket' of medications. This is 1.1 doses per prescription (or 3.9%) higher than in March 2022.

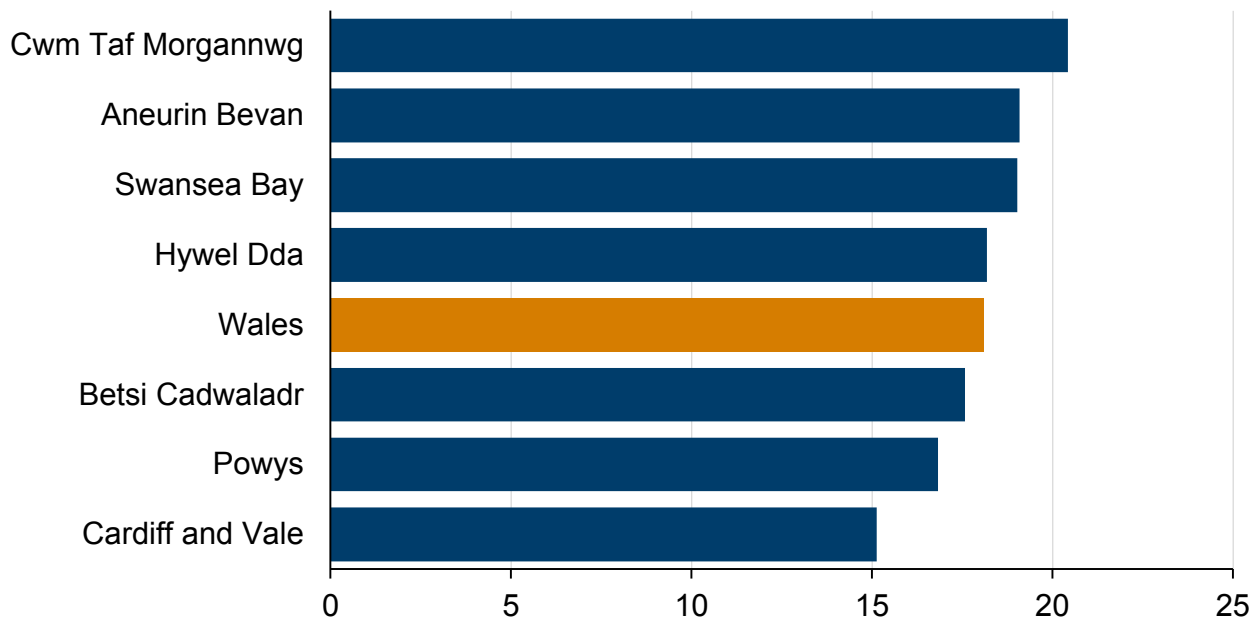
Analysis by local health board

The demographics of local health board areas in Wales are different and therefore their clinical needs are different. For example, patients registered at [GP practices in Wales \(StatsWales\)](#) data for October 2022 shows that 21% of the patients in Wales were aged 65 or over but this ranged between 27% in Powys to 16% in Cardiff and Vale.

To account for the different age profiles of each health board, health board analysis is provided by prescribing unit (PU), rather than simply by health board population. Prescribing units are calculated by giving a greater weight (by a factor of three) to the population aged 65 or over. This adjustment is made because older patients typically require more medications. By making this adjustment for age profiles, the differences between health boards when analysed on a prescribing unit basis are likely to reflect differences in the health of the populations and differences in local prescribing culture.

Figures 12 to 14 provide analysis based on items prescribed through general practices only.

Figure 12: Number of items prescribed through general practice, per prescribing unit, 2022-23 [Note 1]

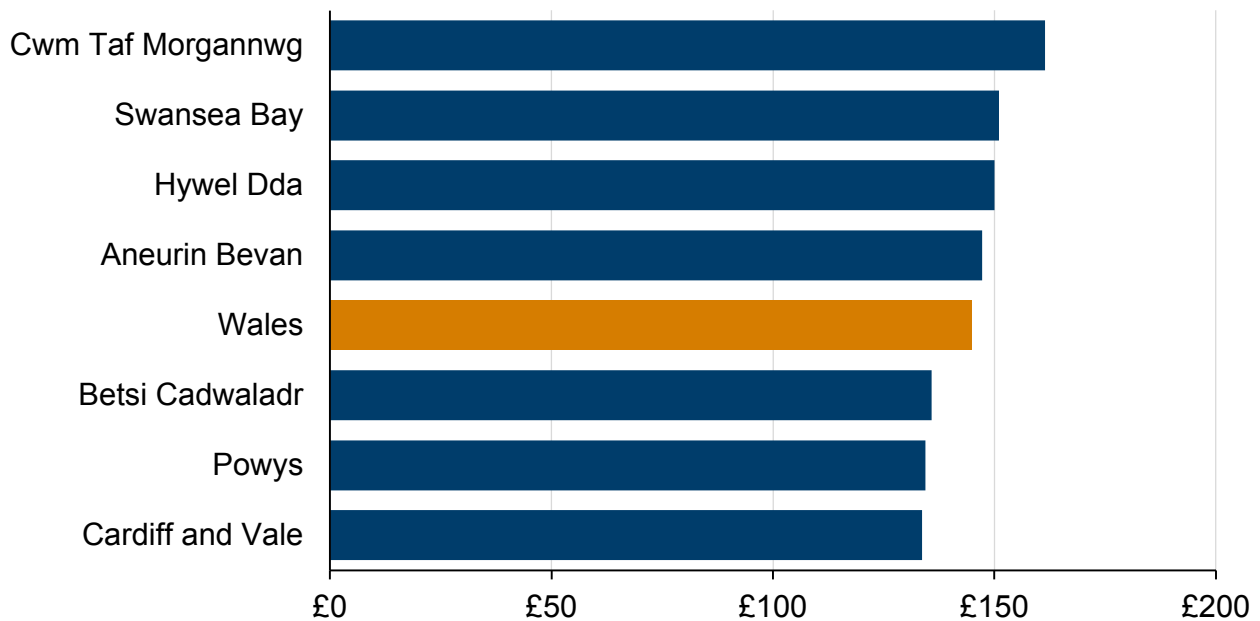


Description of Figure 12: Bar chart showing that the number of items issued per prescribing unit ranged from 15.1 in Cardiff and Vale to 20.4 in Cwm Taf Morgannwg, in 2022-23.

[Note 1] Prescribing units are calculated from the number of patients registered at GP practices mid-way through the financial year, in October 2022

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Figure 13: Net ingredient cost (£) of items prescribed through general practice, per prescribing unit, 2022-23 [Note 1]

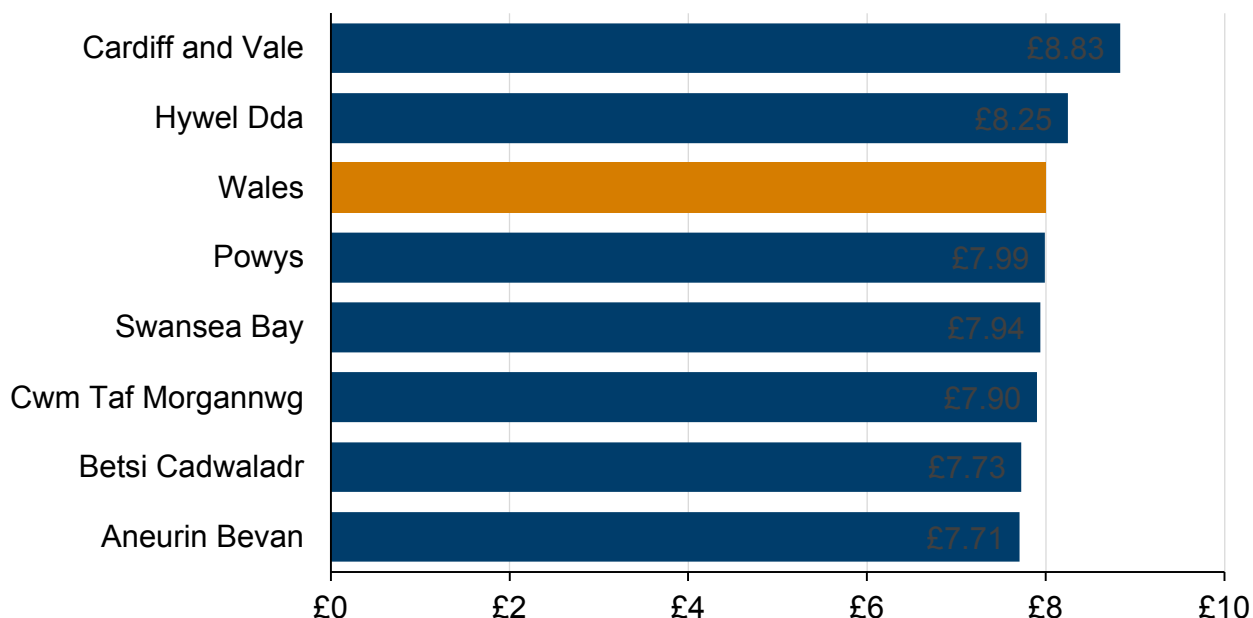


Description of Figure 13: Bar chart showing that the total net ingredient cost of items prescribed through general practices per prescribing unit ranged from £133.68 in Cardiff and Vale to £161.43 in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

[Note 1] Prescribing units are calculated from the number of patients registered at GP practices mid-way through the financial year, in October 2022

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

Figure 14: Net ingredient cost per item prescribed through general practices, per prescribing unit, 2022-23 [Note 1]



Description of Figure 14: Bar chart showing the average cost of items issued per prescribing unit ranged from £7.71 in Aneurin Bevan to £8.83 in Cardiff and Vale.

[Note 1] Prescribing units are calculated from the number of patients registered at GP practices mid-way through the financial year, in October 2022.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

In 2022-23, there were large variations in the number of items prescribed and dispensed between each health board, with 25.9% fewer items prescribed per prescribing unit in Cardiff and Vale than in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

Similarly, there were variations between the net ingredient costs for items

prescribed in each health board with the cost per prescribing unit £27.75 lower in Cardiff and Vale than in Cwm Taf Morgannwg.

However, there was less variation in the cost per items prescribed, per prescribing unit, with six of the seven health boards within £0.30 of the Wales average. The highest cost per item, per prescribing unit was in Cardiff and Vale, 14.6% higher than in Aneurin Bevan.

The statistics suggest fewer items per prescribing unit were required in Cardiff and Vale health board, but residents in the health board required a higher proportion of more expensive items than in other health boards. Conversely, more items per prescribing unit were required in both Cwm Taf Morgannwg and Aneurin Bevan, but residents required a higher proportion of less expensive items than in other health boards.

Prescribing by cluster deprivation

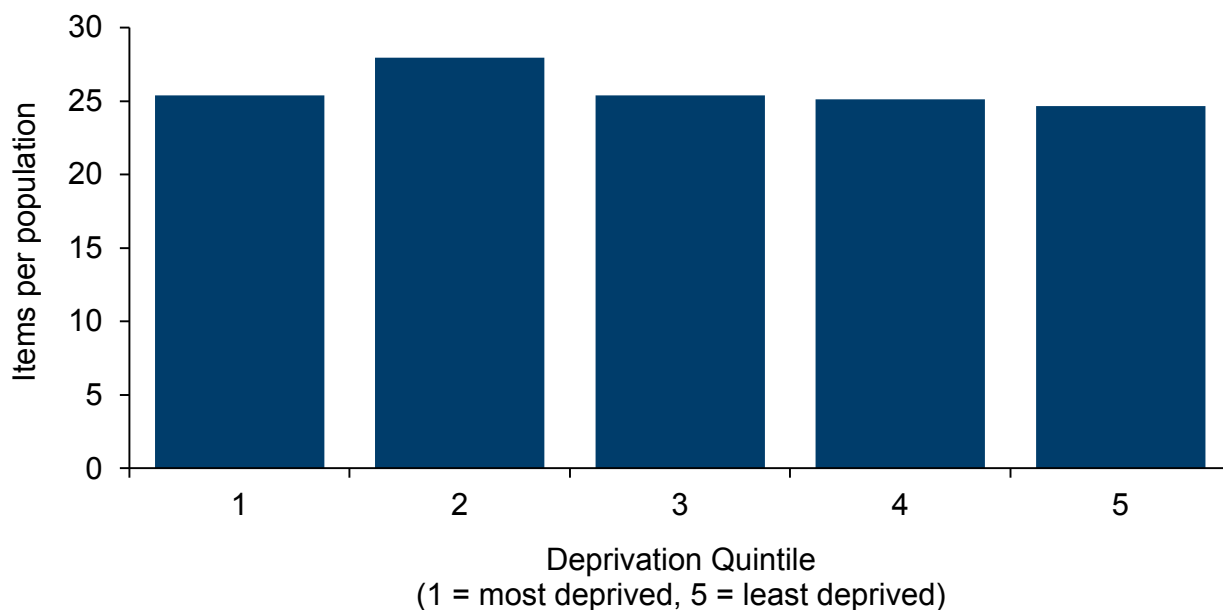
Using **Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)** and **GP practice population data (StatsWales)** it is possible to calculate an approximate measure of deprivation at general practice and GP collaborative/cluster level.

This section summarises items prescribed through general practices by cluster deprivation, using the deprivation measure for percentage of patients registered to practices who live in the most deprived 20% of areas in WIMD 2019. The 64 clusters are ranked from most deprived to least deprived and separated into evenly sized quintiles. The most deprived quintile (quintile 1) contains the 13 clusters with the highest percentage of their population living in deprived areas. The least deprived quintile contains the 13 clusters with the lowest percentage of their population living in deprived areas.

Full details of the methodology used are available in the statistical article

General practice and primary care cluster population and workforce by deprivation: at 31 December 2021.

Figure 15: Number of items prescribed per population by cluster deprivation quintile, 2023-23

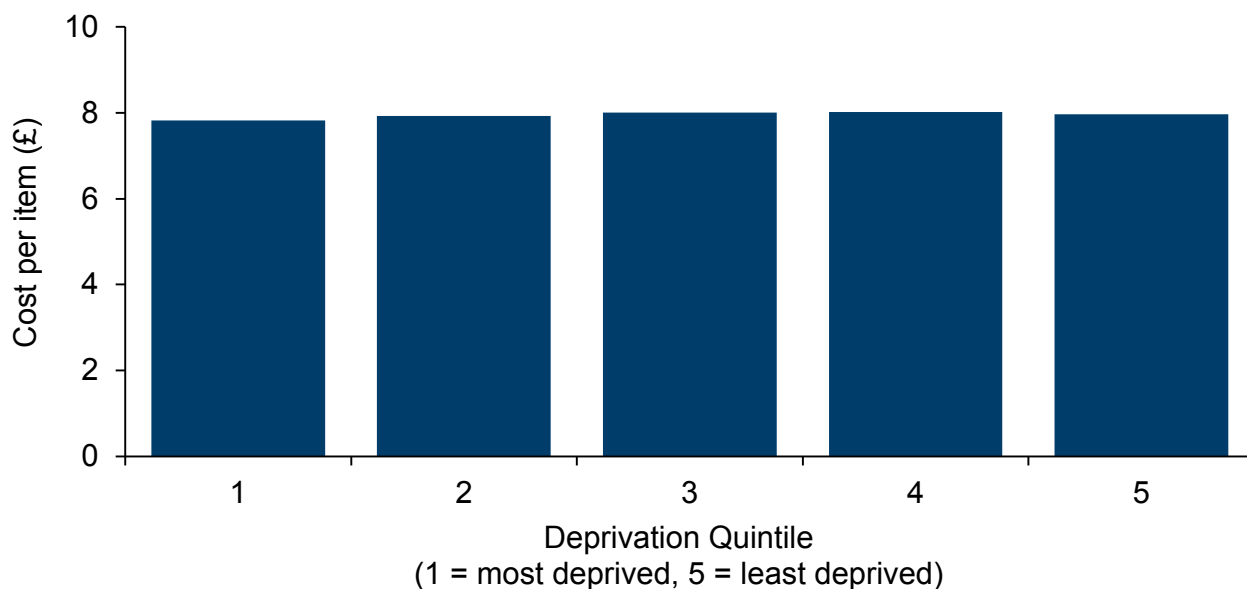


Description of Figure 15: Bar chart showing variations in the number of items prescribed by deprivation quintile, ranging from 28.0 items per person in the second most deprived quintile to 24.6 items per person in the least deprived quintile.

Sources: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership; Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), Welsh Government

Prescription items and costs by cluster deprivation quintiles on StatsWales

Figure 16: Chart 10: Net ingredient cost per item prescribed by cluster deprivation quintile, 2022-23



Description of Figure 16: Bar chart showing small variations in the net ingredient costs per item prescribed by deprivation quintile, ranging from £7.82 per item in the most deprived quintile to £8.02 per item in the second least deprived quintile.

Sources: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership; Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), Welsh Government

Prescription items and costs by cluster deprivation quintiles on StatsWales

In 2022-23, there were small differences in the number of items prescribed and their cost across most cluster deprivation quintiles.

While the statistics do not show a totally linear relationship between the number of items prescribed and deprivation, more items were prescribed per person in the two most deprived quintiles than in the least two deprived quintiles.

There were 0.7 (or 2.9%) more items prescribed per head of population in the most deprived quintile than in the least deprived quintile.

The largest number of items prescribed per head of population was in the second most deprived quintile, where 3.3 (or 11.8%) more items were prescribed than in the least deprived quintile. Over 60% of the population of the second most deprived quintile reside in Cwm Taf Morgannwg or Aneurin Bevan health board areas, the two health boards with the highest prescribing rates per prescribing unit.

The net ingredient cost per item prescribed differed slightly between deprivation quintiles and the cost per item in the most deprived quintile was 20p lower than in the second least deprived quintile, the largest difference between all quintiles.

This suggests while more items are prescribed to people living in more deprived areas, the items are of broadly similar costs to those prescribed to people in less deprived areas.

UK comparisons

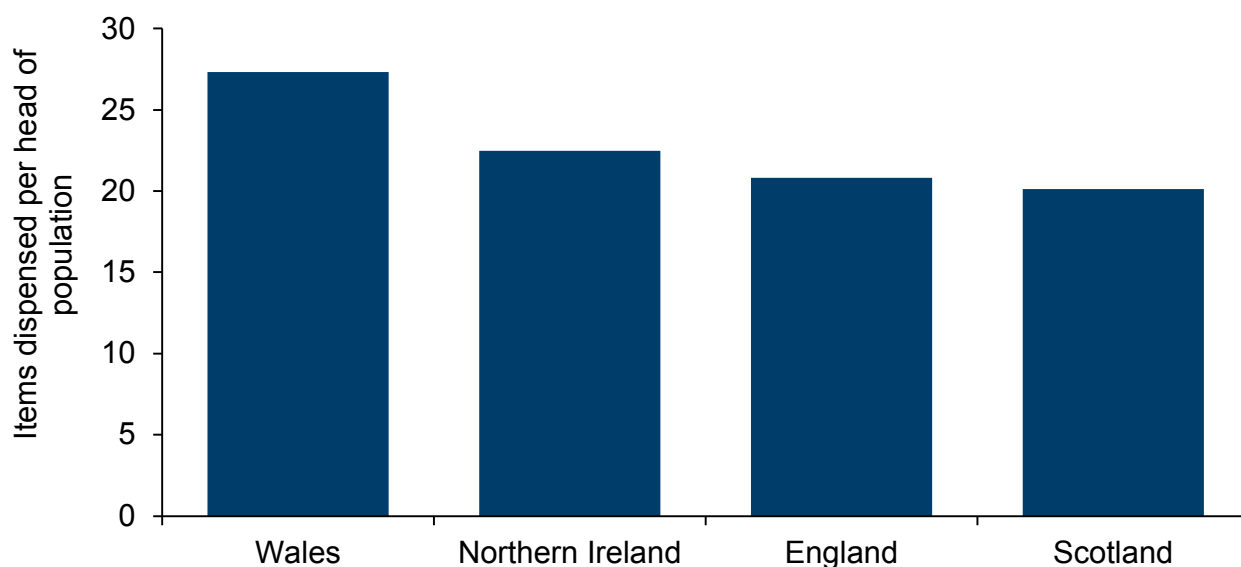
This section compares the number of prescription items dispensed per head of population, the net ingredient cost (NIC) per head of population, and the cost per prescription item across the four UK countries.

The prescription data for these charts is based on the location of the community pharmacy where items were dispensed, rather than by the location of the general practice which issued the prescription. Therefore, statistics for Wales in this section will differ from those presented in the other sections in the release. Prescriptions dispensed in the community is a consistent measure available across all four countries.

For consistency between countries, the latest available Office for National Statistics (ONS) mid-year population estimates (2021) are used in this section, rather than the number of people registered to a GP practice. See quality and methodology information for [quality note about mid-year estimates](#).

Note that the latest data for Wales, England and Scotland refers to 2022-23, and for the calendar year 2022 in Northern Ireland.

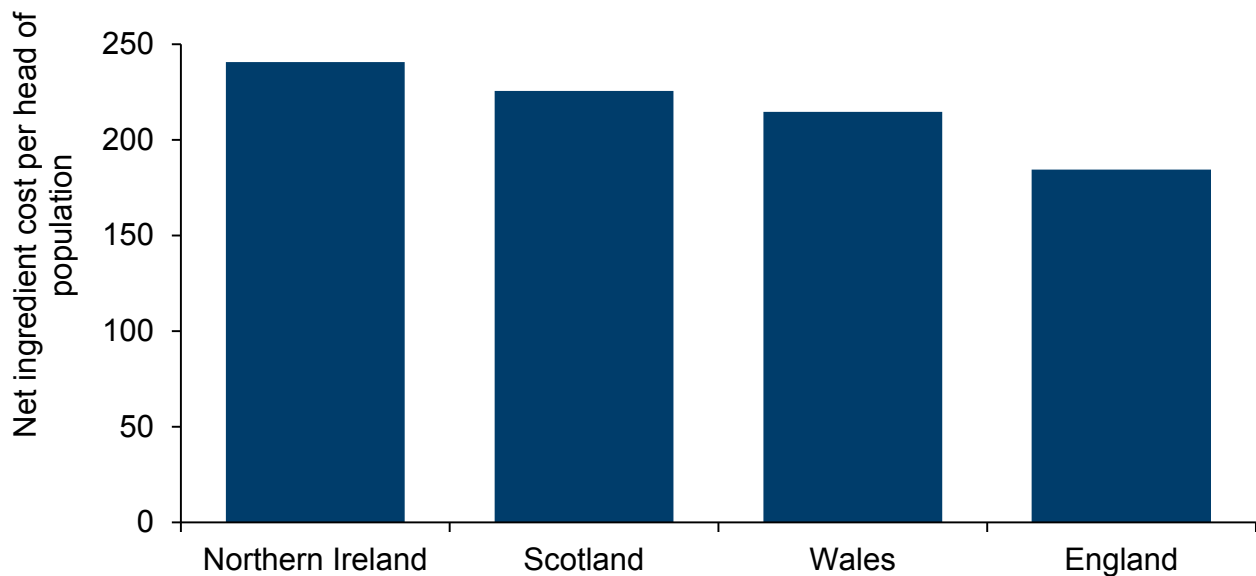
Figure 17: Prescription items dispensed in community pharmacies per head of population, UK countries, 2022-23



Description of Figure 17: Bar chart showing that the number of items dispensed in the community, per population ranged from 20.1 in Scotland to 27.3 in Wales in 2022-23.

Sources: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (Wales), [NHS Business Services Authority \(England\)](#); [Public Health Scotland \(Scotland\)](#) and [Business Services Organisation \(Northern Ireland\)](#).

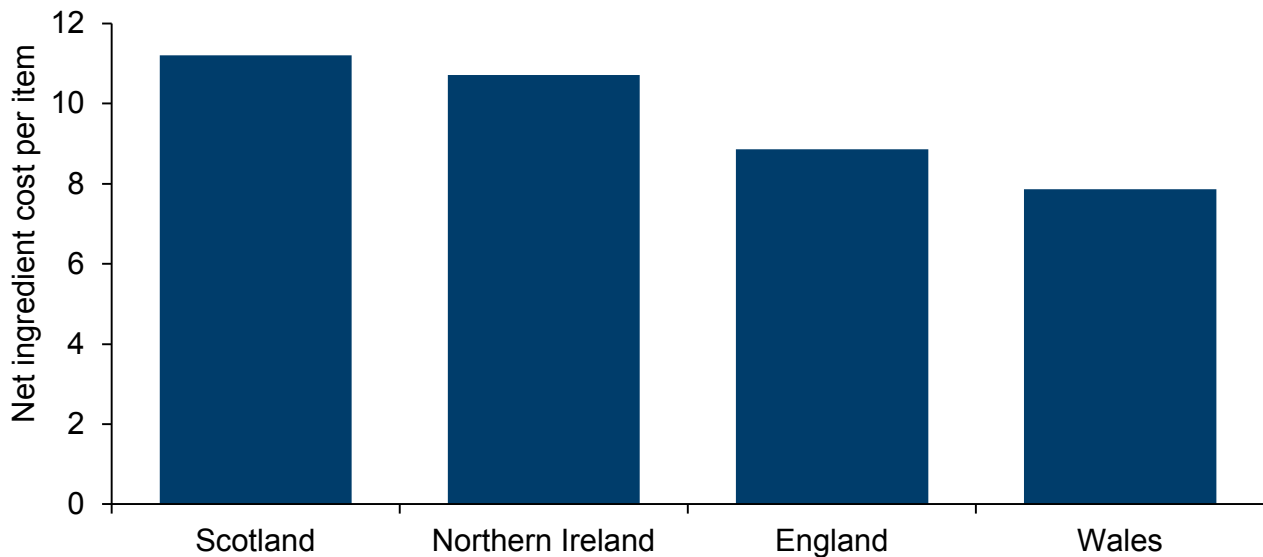
Figure 18: Net ingredient costs per head of population, UK countries, 2022-23



Description of Figure 18: Bar chart showing the net ingredient cost of items dispensed per head of population ranged from £184.41 in England to £240.60 in Northern Ireland.

Sources: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (Wales), [NHS Business Services Authority \(England\)](#); [Public Health Scotland \(Scotland\)](#) and [Business Services Organisation \(Northern Ireland\)](#).

Figure 19: Net ingredient cost per prescription item, UK countries, 2022-23



Description of Figure 19: Bar chart showing the net ingredient cost per prescription item varied from £7.86 in Wales to £11.20 in Scotland.

Sources: NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership (Wales), [NHS Business Services Authority \(England\)](#); [Public Health Scotland \(Scotland\)](#) and [Business Services Organisation \(Northern Ireland\)](#).

There is variation in prescribing between countries. The number of items dispensed per population in Wales was 7.2 items higher than in Scotland. However, the total net ingredient costs of those items per head of population was £10.82 lower in Wales than in Scotland.

The net ingredient cost per prescription item was £7.86 in Wales, the lowest of all UK countries, more than £3.30 cheaper than in Scotland (highest of the UK countries) and £1.00 cheaper than in England (second lowest).

This means that while more items are dispensed in Wales, the items cost less than those dispensed in other countries. This may be explained by: lower volumes of items prescribed in Wales compared to other countries; the differences in types of items prescribed in each country; and the availability of certain items in each country, such as certain more expensive stoma appliances only being available for dispensing in England.

Quality and methodology information

Detailed quality and methodology information is published in the accompanying [quality report](#).

[NHS Shared Service Partnership](#) also publish data on GP prescriptions every month, based on the same data which is presented in this publication.

An [interactive data tool](#) that allows users to search data on BNF chapters, sections, and sub paragraphs, based on general practice prescriptions is published alongside this release.

Data for England ([Prescription Cost Analysis – England 2020-21 \(NHS Business Services Authority\)](#)), Scotland ([Dispenser payments and prescription cost analysis: Financial year 2019/20 \(Public Health Scotland\)](#)) and Northern Ireland ([Prescription Cost Analysis \(Business Services Organisation\)](#)) is published on each country's respective websites.

Complementary data on [general practice workforce](#), [general practice populations \(StatsWales\)](#), [deprivation at general practice level](#) and [community pharmacies](#) are also published by Welsh Government.

Average cost calculations

The mean net ingredient cost is calculated by taking the total net ingredient cost for all prescription items and dividing by the total number of items prescribed during the whole financial year.

The median net ingredient cost is calculated by taking the middle amount when all costs per item are ranked in order from cheapest to most expensive; half of all costs are less than or equal to this amount, and the other half are more than or equal to this amount. This calculation is done on items dispensed in March of each year only, for practical calculation purposes given the large number of items dispensed in a year.

Which data should I use?

Table 1: Comparison of items prescribed by GPs in Wales and dispensed; and items prescribed anywhere in the UK and dispensed in the community in Wales, 2022-23

| BNF Chapter Name | GP prescriptions (thousands) | Prescriptions dispensed in the community (thousands) | Difference (thousands) |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|--|------------------------|
| Gastro-Intestinal System | 7,771.1 | 7,813.5 | -42.3 |
| Cardiovascular System | 23,650.0 | 23,689.2 | -39.2 |
| Respiratory System | 6,159.8 | 6,186.1 | -26.3 |

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| BNF Chapter Name | GP Prescriptions dispensed in (thousands) | Prescriptions dispensed in the community (thousands) | Difference (thousands) |
|--|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Central Nervous System | 17,426.1 | 17,715.0 | -289.0 |
| Infections | 2,596.8 | 2,874.7 | -277.9 |
| Endocrine System | 8,855.6 | 8,907.9 | -52.4 |
| Obstetrics,Gynae+Urinary Tract Disorders | 2,170.6 | 2,187.5 | -16.9 |
| Malignant Disease & Immunosuppression | 417.1 | 445.4 | -28.3 |
| Nutrition And Blood | 4,677.4 | 4,756.0 | -78.5 |
| Musculoskeletal & Joint Diseases | 2,331.9 | 2,361.8 | -29.8 |
| Eye | 1,051.7 | 1,101.5 | -49.7 |
| Ear, Nose And Oropharynx | 1,003.5 | 1,046.9 | -43.4 |
| Skin | 1,835.0 | 1,888.3 | -53.3 |
| Immunological Products & Vaccines | 795.9 | 795.9 | 0.0 |

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| BNF Chapter Name | GP Prescriptions dispensed in (thousands) | Prescriptions dispensed in the community (thousands) | Difference (thousands) |
|-------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------------------|
| Anaesthesia | 103.1 | 105.5 | -2.4 |
| Other Drugs And Preparations | 77.6 | 74.5 | 3.0 |
| Dressings | 351.7 | 256.7 | 95.0 |
| Appliances | 2,434.5 | 2,399.0 | 35.5 |
| Incontinence Appliances | 100.7 | 52.4 | 48.3 |
| Stoma Appliances | 355.1 | 187.7 | 167.4 |
| Total | 84,165.1 | 84,845.5 | -680.3 |

Description of Table 1: Table showing 84.2 million items were prescribed through general practices in Wales and dispensed in the community (in the UK), compared to 84.8 million items prescribed by anywhere in the UK and dispensed in Welsh community pharmacies.

Source: Pharmacy and Dispensing Systems, NHS Wales Shared Services Partnership

In general, when analysing prescriptions data for Wales, items prescribed through general practices (labelled 'GP prescriptions' in the table) should be used as the primary source. This is because this data shows what is being prescribed to people registered with Welsh GP practices and this activity is

monitored and influenced by health boards. This data includes items that are prescribed in by GPs as well as other licensed prescribers who are employed in general practices (mainly nurses and pharmacists). The items prescribed in Welsh general practices can be dispensed in any community dispensary in the UK (usually community pharmacies).

‘Prescriptions dispensed in the community’ should be used for more specific purposes where users are interested only in the items actually dispensed in Wales, and if direct comparisons are being made between different UK countries. While the number of items prescribed by GPs is close to the number of items prescribed and dispensed in Wales it does not exactly match for a number of reasons including:

- Items prescribed in Wales but dispensed elsewhere in the UK (including the Isle of Man) are counted in general practice prescriptions but not ‘prescriptions dispensed in the community’. This is particularly common for specialist items such as stomas and incontinence appliances which are often dispensed by appliance contractors, many of which are not located in Wales.
- Items prescribed in another UK country (including the Isle of Man) but dispensed in Wales are not included in general practice prescriptions, but are included in ‘prescriptions dispensed in the community’
- Items which were prescribed by hospital practitioners, which the patient then takes to a community pharmacy for dispensing will not be included in general practice prescriptions, but they would be included in ‘prescriptions dispensed in the community’

Note that both ‘general practice prescriptions’ and ‘prescriptions dispensed in the community’ capture prescriptions which are dispensed by dispensing doctors, appliance contractors and community (high street) pharmacies. Neither source contains data for items prescribed and dispensed in hospitals.

Also note that net ingredient costs (NIC) are not adjusted for inflation.

Mid-year population estimates

UK comparisons are calculated using mid-2021 population estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) as these were the latest available population estimates. It is expected that changes between the mid-2021 and mid-2022 estimates would have little impact on the statistics in this release. However, if the impacts are substantial, a revision note will be issued for these statistics.

Well-being of Future Generations Act (WFG)

The Well-being of Future Generations Act 2015 is about improving the social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act puts in place seven wellbeing goals for Wales. These are for a more equal, prosperous, resilient, healthier and globally responsible Wales, with cohesive communities and a vibrant culture and thriving Welsh language. Under section (10)(1) of the Act, the Welsh Ministers must (a) publish indicators (“national indicators”) that must be applied for the purpose of measuring progress towards the achievement of the wellbeing goals, and (b) lay a copy of the national indicators before Senedd Cymru. Under section 10(8) of the Well-being of Future Generations Act, where the Welsh Ministers revise the national indicators, they must as soon as reasonably practicable (a) publish the indicators as revised and (b) lay a copy of them before the Senedd. These national indicators were laid before the Senedd in 2021. The indicators laid on 14 December 2021 replace the set laid on 16 March 2016.

Information on the indicators, along with narratives for each of the wellbeing goals and associated technical information is available in the [Wellbeing of Wales report](#).

Further information on the [Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act](#)

2015.

The statistics included in this release could also provide supporting narrative to the national indicators and be used by public services boards in relation to their local wellbeing assessments and local wellbeing plans.

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SFR 100/2023



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