Antidepressant Prescribing Guidance for Adults (over 18) with **Moderate to Severe** Depression (joint document between CWP, Wirral, South, East and West Cheshire and Vale Royal CCGs)

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<th>Lead executive</th>
<th>Director, Compliance, Quality and Assurance</th>
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| Target audience  | All CWP staff
Primary care prescribers |

| Document purpose | This pathway is a whole system approach in that it has been agreed in consultation with the CCGs. The pathway concentrates on the treatment of moderate to severe depression with medication for adults over 18 years (for child and adolescent management refer to the NICE clinical guidelines (September 2005) including comparison of anti-depressants and guidance on stopping and swapping anti-depressants. This pathway should be used in conjunction with the full depression care pathway. |

| Approving meeting | CWP Medicines Management Group
Central & Eastern Cheshire APC
Wirral Medicines Management Committee
West Cheshire APC |
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| Implementation date | November 2018 followed by an annual compliance review |

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| Clinical Services      | • Hazel Sharp, Deputy Chief Pharmacist CWP  
|                        | • Dr Sumit Sehgal, Chair MMG & Consultant Psychiatrist  
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| Corporate services     | • Medicines Management Group (CWP)  |
| External agencies      | • CCG Prescribing Group Meetings  
|                        | • Interface Sub Group for Medicines Management  
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|                        | • Barbara Perry, Senior Medicines Optimisation Lead  |
| Financial resource implications | Low |
| External references   | 1. NICE Clinical Guidelines 90, Depression: the treatment and management of depression in adults (update)  
|                        | 2. NICE Clinical Guidelines 91, The treatment and management of depression in adults with chronic physical health problems (partial update of CG23)  
|                        | 4. NICE Technology Appraisal 367, Vortioxetine for treating major depressive episodes, November 2015  
<p>| Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) - Initial assessment | Yes/No | Comments |
| Does this document affect one group less or more favourably than another on the basis of: | | |
| - Race | No | |
| - Ethnic origins (including gypsies and travellers) | No | |</p>
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Is there any evidence that some groups are affected differently? No

If you have identified potential discrimination, are there any exceptions valid, legal and/or justifiable? Select

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Where an adverse or negative impact on equality group(s) has been identified during the initial screening process a full EIA assessment should be conducted.

If you have identified a potential discriminatory impact of this procedural document, please refer it to the human resource department together with any suggestions as to the action required to avoid / reduce this impact. For advice in respect of answering the above questions, please contact the human resource department.

Was a full impact assessment required? No
What is the level of impact? Low
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Quick reference flowchart - Antidepressant treatment pathway

Has patient:
- A past history of moderate/severe depression
- Experienced sub-threshold depressive symptoms for at least 2 years
- Suffered sub-threshold/mild symptoms persisting after other interventions [NICE point 1.4.4.1]
- Diagnosed with moderate/severe depression, and using other psychological interventions [NICE point 1.5.1.2]

Consider initiating antidepressant therapy

Give information from Choice and Medication to include; treatment options, side effects, suicide risk. Patient give informed consent or treatment appropriate under MHA

Does patient have any contraindications, additional risk factors or comorbidities which may affect safe use of antidepressants; e.g. interacting medicines (see 2.13), over 65, LD, epilepsy

Initiate, monitor, maintain and discontinue antidepressant therapy following flowchart 2.12

Initiate, monitor, maintain and discontinue antidepressant therapy following flowchart 2.12. But consider drug dose and choice for individual patient (see 2.11)
1. Introduction
This Pathway is a revision of issue 5, based on the change in recommendations by NICE. As before this pathway is the result of consultation across the three CCGs we work with to agree a unified approach to how depression is managed pharmacologically across primary and specialist care. The pathway identifies the points at which referral to specialist services is recommended, as well as the pharmacological options in treatment. This Pathway should not be considered in isolation but as part of the care pathway for managing depression.

2. Initiation of depression treatment
SSRIs are usually first choice as they are as effective as other antidepressants, have lower toxicity in overdose and are generally better tolerated than tricyclic antidepressants; also see NICE CG90 section 1.5.2 and section 2.2 below, All antidepressants should be initiated in their generic form.

Initiating antidepressants should be considered in patients who:
- Have a past history of moderate/severe depression
- Have experienced sub-threshold depressive symptoms for at least 2 years
- Have sub-threshold/mild symptoms persisting after other interventions [NICE CG90 point 1.4.4.1]
- Have moderate/severe depression, used in combination with other psychological interventions [NICE CG90 point 1.5.1.2]

Have moderate/severe depression, used in combination with other psychological interventions [NICE CG90 point 1.5.1.2]

2.1 Information for patients
Information should be provided at a level suitable for the patient. Comprehensible written information should be provided such as http://www.choiceandmedication.org/cheshire-and-wirral/

Information should include:
- The nature of depression
- Range of treatments available
- Depression is an illness which can be treated with medication
- Medicine will take at least two to three weeks to have an effect and can be up to 6 weeks
- Most side effects are self-limiting- discuss with doctor or pharmacist if concerned
- Addiction does not occur with antidepressants [NICE CG90 1.5.2.5]
- Important to take medicine every day and not stop suddenly.

2.2 Contraindications
When initiating antidepressant medication, take into account:
- SSRIs are associated with an increased bleeding risk, especially in older people. Consider prescribing a gastro protective drug in older people who are taking non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) or aspirin [NICE CG90 1.5.2.2]
- Toxicity in overdose for those at significant risk of suicide [NICE CG90 1.5.2.3]
- Interactions with drugs used in other conditions (see below section 2.11)
- Patient safety alerts and drug interactions detailed in the British National Formulary (BNF).
- Please note, where there are contra-indications with other medicines that prolong QT interval e.g. citalopram, escitalopram, this requires due consideration especially when psychotropic medication is augmented

2.3 Reviewing antidepressant treatment
If inadequate response to initial pharmacological treatment:
- Check adherence and side effects
- Increase monitoring
- Consider reintroducing previous treatments that have been inadequately delivered/adhered to
- Consider switching antidepressant (see section 2.6 below).

2.4 Continuation and maintenance antidepressant treatment
Continue treatment for:

- A minimum of 6 months after remission, 24 months in the elderly.
- Longer than 6 months (24 in the elderly) in patients with residual depressive symptoms and other factors increasing risk of relapse.
- At least 2 years (and consider maintenance) for people who have had two or more depressive episodes in the recent past and who have experienced significant functional impairment during the episodes

Also consider maintenance for patients who have had more than 5 depressive episodes or who have persistent risk factors for relapse/recurrence.

Continue the same dose as used during the acute phase.

2.5 Discontinuing antidepressant therapy
Discontinuation or withdrawal syndrome has been associated with the abrupt discontinuation of all doses of antidepressants and with drugs that have a shorter half-life. Symptoms usually appear within a few days of stopping the antidepressant. Most reactions are mild and rarely last more than two weeks. Withdrawal symptoms include dizziness, anxiety and agitation, abdominal spasms, low mood and mood swings. There have been isolated reports of electric shock sensations, vertigo and manic reactions on withdrawal of SSRIs (Committee for the Safety of Medicine (downloaded 2010) Report of the CSM Expert working group on the safety of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor antidepressants).

The recommendation for discontinuing therapy is as follows:

- Taper the dose over 4 to 8 weeks if have been on treatment for 6 to 8 months.
- If have been on a maintenance dose then it is necessary to reduce the dose more slowly e.g. decrease the dose by approximately a quarter of the treatment dose every 4 to 6 weeks. Discontinuation effects are more likely with antidepressants which have shorter half-lives e.g. venlafaxine and paroxetine (NICE CG90).
- For courses of antidepressants shorter than 8 weeks, discontinue therapy over 1 to 2 weeks. This also applies when changing therapy from one antidepressant to another.
- Fluoxetine can be stopped at a dose of 20mg daily due to its long half-life and active metabolites.
- If a discontinuation reaction occurs, reassurance and explanation to the patient is required. If the withdrawal reaction is severe then consider re-commencing the antidepressant and reduce the dose more slowly (Anderson, Nutt & Deakin, 2000), (MeReC bulletin 2000, Psychotropic Drug Directory 2016)

The manufacturer of Vortioxetine suggest that it can be stopped abruptly with no need to taper the dose, however experience in clinical setting is limited and the drug still has “black triangle” status. (T1/2= 66hrs).

2.6 Switching antidepressants
When switching from one antidepressant to another, abrupt withdrawal of the original antidepressant should be avoided. Cross tapering is preferred, where the dose of the original antidepressant is slowly reduced while the dose of the new antidepressant is slowly increased. The speed is judged by monitoring patient tolerability. When switching, consider a different SSRI or better tolerated new generation antidepressant before switching to an antidepressant of a different pharmacological class that may be less well tolerated [NICE CG 90 1.8.1.2]. For some switches it may be possible to abruptly stop one antidepressant and start the next, consideration needs to be given to the pharmacology and half-life of the two antidepressants, consult references in box below for further information.

Potential dangers of simultaneously administering two antidepressants include pharmacodynamic interactions (serotonin syndrome, hypotension, drowsiness) and pharmacokinetic interactions (e.g. elevation of tricyclic plasma levels by some SSRIs).

Brief guidance on swapping from fluoxetine/citalopram/sertraline to second line choices:
• To other SSRIs – Stop citalopram or sertraline and start next SSRI. Fluoxetine has long half-life so leave washout period (4-7 days) and start SSRI at half dose.
• To mirtazapine - cross taper cautiously
• To venlafaxine or duloxetine - start at 37.5mg cross taper with citalopram or sertraline, withdraw fluoxetine and leave a 4-7 day washout period.
• To tricyclics – citalopram or sertraline reduce to minimum dose; for fluoxetine withdraw & wait 4-7 days before starting tricyclic at very low dose.
• DO NOT switch to or start dosulepin due to increased cardiac risk and toxicity in overdose [NICE CG90 1.8.1.3].

This list is not exhaustive; for further information or advice in specific cases see The Psychotropic Drug Directory 2016, Stephen Bazire and the Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines, 12th Edition, D. Taylor, C.Paton and S. Kapur or contact your local medicines information service, or if under the care of CWP the consultant psychiatrist.

Please also refer to: https://www.mims.co.uk/table-antidepressants-guide-switching-withdrawing/mental-health/ accessible by GPs, nurses or subscribers.

2.7 Serotonin syndrome
Symptoms include (also see Appendix 1 Information sheet - Serotonin Syndrome vs Discontinuation effects of Antidepressants): Restlessness, diaphoresis, tremor, shivering, myoclonus, confusion, convulsions and death.

Management of serotonin syndrome is dependent on the severity of the symptoms and for mild symptoms it is sufficient to withdraw the serotonergic medicines and monitor. For more severe symptoms it may be necessary to admit to hospital for supportive management in addition to stopping the serotonergic medicines.

2.8 Antidepressants in pregnancy and lactation
When prescribing for patients who are pregnant or planning a pregnancy do not stop antidepressants abruptly, seek information and advice first. Information about medicines in pregnancy from the UK Teratology Information Service can be found at https://www.toxbase.org/.


2.9 Prescribing in older people and those with learning disabilities
When prescribing antidepressants for older people and people with learning disability:

• Prescribe at an age-appropriate dose taking into account the effect of general physical health and concomitant medication on pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics [NICE CG90 1.6.1.3]. Bear in mind that this group of people may have reduced renal and hepatic function due to chronic physical illness.

• Consider comorbid conditions such as epilepsy

• People with learning disabilities who are depressed can present with challenging behaviour. In such situations, antidepressant medication needs to be considered as an option. Due to complexities in presentation and communication problems, specialist advice from a Learning Disability Psychiatrist should be sought.

• Carefully monitor for side effects.

For those with learning disabilities a dose appropriate to their general physical health needs to be considered along with the pharmacokinetics and pharmacodynamics of the medicine in the individual.

2.10 Suicide risk and antidepressant treatment
A person with depression started on antidepressants who is considered to present an increased suicide risk or is younger than 30 years (because of the potential increased prevalence of suicidal
thoughts in the early stages of antidepressant treatment for this group) should normally be seen / reviewed after 1 week and then frequently thereafter as appropriate until the risk is no longer considered clinically important [NICE CG90 1.5.2.7].

Generally those over 30 years with a suicide risk would be reviewed every two weeks. The standard risk review is carried out every four weeks in those with no suicide risks.

Tricyclic antidepressants are associated with a greater toxicity in overdose and of the antidepressants recommended in primary care; venlafaxine also carries a higher risk of toxicity (NICE CG90).

### 2.11 Choosing an antidepressant in physical health conditions

Information here is taken from the Psychotropic Drug Directory 2016 and The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines 12th edition. Please refer to current editions as well as the BNF (which can be found at https://www.medicinescomplete.com/mc/bnf/current/) and the Summary of Product Characteristics which can be found at www.medicines.org.uk.

#### Cardiovascular disease
- Sertraline or mirtazapine are generally considered safer options and there is evidence that they are safe post MI (Maudsley & PDD)
- Venlafaxine has dose dependant effect on blood pressure & heart rate (increase) check blood pressure & pulse before initiation and after dose increase (Efexor SPC accessed 23/10/2017 at www.medicines.org.uk).
- If doses venlafaxine of 300mg or above are required this should be reviewed by the psychiatrist. Combination antidepressants or adjunctive therapy may be used as an alternative to high dose venlafaxine. High doses of venlafaxine can cause high blood pressure; blood pressure should be monitored regularly.
- Patients with pre-existing cardiovascular conditions and prescribed venlafaxine, moclobemide, all tricyclics, citalopram or escitalopram are advised to have a baseline ECG and repeat as clinically indicated.
- Tricyclics should be avoided due to their cardiac side effects, lofepramine is the least cardio-toxic of the tricyclics. Cardiac arrhythmias are a contra-indication for tricyclic antidepressants and therefore an ECG should be performed to rule this out.
- Escitalopram and citalopram are contra-indicated in those with prolonged QTc or in combination with other drugs which cause QTc prolongation and an ECG must be performed before initiation to rule out QTc prolongation.
- A definitive answer is not provided in the standard references for monitoring during maintenance treatment. From clinical practice at CWP it is recommended that for patients maintained on tricyclics, citalopram, escitalopram or venlafaxine 300mg or more that blood pressure and ECG are monitored a minimum of yearly following stabilisation of dose.

#### Diabetes

Having diabetes doubles the odds of having co-morbid depression (Maudsley)
- SSRIs have been associated with improved diabetic parameters e.g. HBA1c.
- Duloxetine and venlafaxine are likely to be safe but there is less supporting evidence.
- Mirtazapine can cause weight gain but effect in diabetes not established. No data for trazadone but no known problems.
- Avoid tricyclics and MAOIs
- Monitor blood glucose and HBA1c when antidepressants are started, following dose change or discontinuation (Maudsley).
**Epilepsy**
General advice is to keep the dose low as pro-convulsive effect is likely to be dose related and to introduce and withdraw the drug slowly.
- SSRIs do not appear to significantly increase seizure threshold. Citalopram is pro-convulsive in overdose.
- Mirtazepine appears to be relatively safe in epilepsy and Maudsley Guidelines consider it a good choice.
- No problems reported with moclobemide.
- Venlafaxine needs to be introduced and withdrawn slowly, it is pro-convulsive in overdose.
- Tricyclics do appear to lower seizure threshold, amitriptyline may be the highest risk.
- Trazadone vortioxetine and duloxetine are all cautioned in the Summary of Product Characteristics for use in epilepsy.

**SSRIs and bleeding**
There is an increased risk of bleeding with SSRI antidepressants. This includes GI bleeding, cerebral bleeds and perioperative bleeding.
- The risk of bleeding with SSRIs is higher in those who have had previous GI or cerebral bleeds.
- Risk is further increased when taken concomitantly with NSAIDs, aspirin or oral anticoagulants so avoid SSRIs in people who need to take these medicines.
- When it is not possible to avoid SSRIs monitor carefully and if using in combination with NSAIDs, aspirin or oral anticoagulants prescribe a proton pump inhibitor for gastro-protection (this will reduce the risk of GI bleed somewhat but will not absolutely negate the risk).

This information is taken from The Maudsley Prescribing Guidelines 12th edition and further details can be found via this reference source.

**Glaucoma**
Medicines with anticholinergic effects can induce or worsen narrow angle glaucoma. Tricyclics have the highest risk of anticholinergic effects amongst the antidepressants and should be avoided.

**Hyponatremia**
May occur with all antidepressants and is particularly common in elderly patients and female gender. Co-prescription of other drugs known to cause hyponatremia e.g. NSAIDs, diuretics, ACE inhibitors, carbamazepine, calcium agonists, increase the risk.
- Highest risk with SSRIs citalopram, escitalopram, fluoxetine and sertraline.
- Lowest risk appears to be with mirtazapine.
**Anticholinergic burden**

Anticholinergic medicines are used to treat a variety of conditions and can cause a range of side effects including confusion, constipation, delirium, disorientation, memory impairment, agitation, risk of falls, hallucinations, dry eyes, and urinary retention. There is an association (not causation) between anticholinergic use and both dementia and mortality. Prescribers need to be aware of the anticholinergic burden of drugs, particularly in those on multiple medications. Use of antidepressants should be considered alongside the patients’ other medicines.

**Summary:**

- Older tricyclics: moderate with nortriptyline, imipramine. Marked with others
- Lofepramine: moderate although constipation / sweating can be severe
- SSRIs: dry mouth can be a problem with paroxetine
- Others: minimal with mirtazapine and venlafaxine; duloxetine – few effects
### 2.12 Antidepressant treatment pathway for adults (over 18) with moderate to severe depression

NB: This pathway deals with medication only, appropriate psychological therapies should be considered at each stage.

1. **Is the depression moderate or severe in degree?**
   - If psychosis or suicidal intent is present at any stage consider secondary referral.
   - Previously successful drugs should be considered first. New presentations should start with Sertraline, Fluoxetine or Citalopram.

   - **Ineffective**
     - Alternative SSRI
       - **Ineffective**
         - Mirtazapine or Venlafaxine or Duloxetine or Trazodone or a Tricyclic (not Dosulepin) or
         - ◊ Vortioxetine shared care (Named Patient Request **)
           - **Ineffective**
             - a) * Augment Lithium/ Antipsychotic e.g. Quetiapine
             - b) * Combination two antidepressants e.g. Venlafaxine/ Mirtazapine SSRI / Mirtazapine
      
      - **Effective**
        - Where an antidepressant is deemed ineffective, consider whether an increase in dose is required. Check adherence to medication.

2. **KEY:**
   - * Specialist initiation only;
   - ** For CWP initiation of Vortioxetine Name Patient Request must be requested from Specialist to CWP Medicines Management Group.

3. **NOTES FOR PRESCRIBERS**
   - Review patients as per NICE guidelines. Check adherence.
   - Review for response in 4 weeks. If partial response review in further two weeks.
   - Continue at effective dose for at least 6 months (24 months in elderly or if risk of relapse) after recovery before tapering and stopping. Continue antidepressant if at risk of relapse for at least 2 years (NICE 1.9.1.4).
   - Ensure patients are given information on treatment at each appointment.
   - DO NOT Prescribe Dosulepin, St John’s Wort
   - MAOIs only to be initiated by specialist mental health professional
   - For all dosages and duration of treatment refer to NICE CG90 and the current edition of the BNF.
2.13 Drug Treatment of Depression


Throughout decision making on treatment options check patient adherence to prescribed medication.

See BNF or the Summary of Product Characteristics at www.medicines.org.uk for dosing information.
Appendix 1 - Serotonin Syndrome vs Discontinuation Effects of Antidepressants

Prepared by: Jennifer Southern, Senior Clinical Pharmacist jennifer.southern@cwp.nhs.uk, October 2017

**Serotonin Syndrome**
Onset usually within hours of drug or dose changes and resolves within 24 hours but it is potential fatal. Monitor for signs of serotonin syndrome if using higher doses or more than one serotonergic drug.

**Signs and symptoms include:**
- Restlessness/agitation
- Diaphoresis (excessive sweating)
- Diarrhoea, Nausea, Vomiting
- Lack of coordination
- Tachycardia, Fever
- Tremor or Shivering
- Confusion
- Myoclonus
- Convulsions

**Treatment:** Stop all serotonergic drugs, symptomatic support e.g. keeping cool with fans, consider if benzodiazepines need prescribing.

**Drugs reported to cause serotonin syndrome:** Antidepressants – monotherapy or in combination.

The following drugs are reported to cause serotonin syndrome in combination with an antidepressant:
- Lithium
- Tramadol
- Fluconazole
- St John’s Wort
- Quetiapine
- Risperidone
- Pethidine
- Fentanyl
- Linezolid
- Metoclopramide
- Selegiline
- Olanzapine

**Discontinuation Effects of Antidepressants**
When taken for six or more weeks antidepressants should be discontinued slowly unless stopping due to a serious adverse effect. Discontinuation effects usually occur within 1-2 days of stopping or reducing dose and resolve within 24 hours of restarting the previous dose.

**Withdrawal/discontinuation symptoms include:**
- Headache
- Nausea or vomiting
- Flu-like symptoms
- Fatigue
- Abdominal cramps
- Sleep disturbances, vivid dreaming or insomnia
- For SSRIs may also get electric shock like sensations in head, dizziness or vertigo.

**Treatment:** If discontinuation effects occur then re-stabilise at previous dose and reduce by a smaller amount or over a longer period, it may be necessary to use a liquid or switch to a different antidepressant with a longer half-life or different formulations to complete the discontinuation.

**References:**
- Psychotropic Drug Directory 2016 by Stephen Bazire
Appendix 2  Antidepressant costs


Costs based on 28 day prescribing for the usual dose range of each antidepressant (tricyclic antidepressants calculated at minimum dose 100mg/day).

Prices are taken from the Drug Tariff November 2017 and the November 2017 price concessions and No Cheaper Stock Obtainable (NCSO) list set by the Department of Health. The Drug Tariff and price concessions and NCSO lists are updated monthly and can be accessed at [http://www.drugtariff.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/#/00488000-DB_1/DB00487996/Home](http://www.drugtariff.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/#/00488000-DB_1/DB00487996/Home) and [http://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/supply-chain/generic-shortages/](http://psnc.org.uk/dispensing-supply/supply-chain/generic-shortages/) respectively.

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Where a generic product is available it should be prescribed and supplied.

*Trazodone liquid requires a non-formulary request; cost is £138.20 for 120ml 50mg/5ml.

** Venlafaxine prices vary significantly between brands.

Trimipramine requires a non-formulary request; cost £380 for 100mg/day for 28days treatment.