

# GUIDANCE: HOW TO SPOT A FORGED/FRAUDULENT SCRIPT

Although it can be difficult to detect a forged prescription, every pharmacist should be alert to the possibility that **any** prescription could be a forgery.

## WHAT IS A FORGED OR FRAUDULENT PRESCRIPTION?

A forged or fraudulent prescription can be a genuine prescription form, which:

- Has been stolen
- Has been altered by someone other than an authorised prescriber (for example to increase the quantity or dose, or add additional items)
- Is not signed by an authorised prescriber or it could be a fake prescription form.

## WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR

COLOUR OF THE PRESCRIPTION FORM:

- FP10PCD – **PINK** (Private prescription for Schedule 2 and 3 Controlled Drugs ONLY)
- FP10 – **GREEN** (GPs, Nurse, AHP, Pharmacist and Hospital outpatient)
- FP10MDA – **BLUE** (Substance Misuse)
- FP10PN – **LILAC** (Community/Independent Nurse and AHP prescribers)
- FP10D – **YELLOW** (Dentists)

The colours of legitimate FP10 forms are deliberately hard to copy, so a fake one tends to stand out. Unfortunately, this is not the case for private clinics who can provide private prescriptions on headed notepaper as this is much easier to produce.

### **Serial Numbers**

All FP10 prescription forms have serial numbers. When an alert has been issued the serial number should be included to alert other pharmacies.

### **Date prescription issued**

Remember the time intervals within which prescriptions must be presented for dispensing.

There may be a genuine reason for having an old but still valid prescription, query this with the patient to establish if this seems plausible.

Schedule 2, 3 and 4 prescriptions are valid for ONLY 28 days from the appropriate date.

### **Address of prescriber**

Fraudulent scripts are usually presented outside of the area in which the clinic/practice is based. The prescriptions are also usually presented outside of clinic/practice opening hours.

## Alterations or additions

These can include changes to:

- Both printed and handwritten items on prescriptions
- The prescriber's signature
- Quantities of drugs prescribed
- Use of amateur type-setting kits to print onto stolen prescriptions
- Fully handwritten prescription
- Photocopied A4 printed headed paper

The following checklist may be useful to help detect fraudulent prescriptions and prompt further investigation:

- Is it a large or excessive quantity being prescribed and is this appropriate for the medicine and condition being treated?
- Is the prescriber known?
- Is the patient known?
- Has the title 'Dr' been inserted before the signature?
- Is the behaviour of the patient indicative? (e.g. nervous, agitated, aggressive, etc.)
- Is the medicine known to be commonly abused?
- Does the handwriting match hand-written scripts from that prescriber that you've seen previously?
- Is the spacing sensible?
- Are the drug names spelt correctly and are the quantities and directions logical?

You tend to know the signatures of the prescribers local to the pharmacy. If the signature is not known and you are concerned check this against another prescription with the same signature. If the prescriber is not known to you then check with the clinic/practice issuing the prescription.

## What to do if you are presented with a forged or fraudulent prescription

If threatened, or if you believe that the person may become violent, then telephone the police as soon as you can on 999.

### DO NOT DISPENSE!

You should not dispense the medication but keep the prescription – be careful not to give the person a chance to take it back. If you are concerned that the script may be taken back, add 'presented at xxx pharmacy on xx/xx/xx' at the top of the prescription.

### STALL FOR TIME!

Inform the patient that you can't dispense the prescription immediately and ask them to either wait or return later (if possible, ask them to say when they will return). Delaying tactics could include, lack of stock, lunchtime closure, backlog of work or that you need to speak to the prescriber.

### CHECK WITH THE PRESCRIBER!

Telephone the prescriber to confirm whether or not the prescription has been issued, altered or forged. Use a published telephone number rather than any number given on the suspect prescription, unless you are sure it is correct.

### **CALL THE POLICE!**

If the person who presented the prescription is waiting in the pharmacy, or is expected to return shortly, call the police on 101, explain the situation and ask them to attend immediately. If it is not known when the person may return, or they are to returning another day, you still need to report the crime and obtain a crime reference number.

### **GET BACK-UP!**

If your pharmacy is part of a larger store which has security staff, arrange for a member of security staff to come to the pharmacy immediately if support I required.

### **IF THE PATIENT RETURNS**

Ask them to wait (using the delaying tactics above) and contact the police on 101 if you haven't already done so. as above. If that is not possible, say that you are unable to dispense the prescription because you believe it may not be genuine / may have been altered, and that the police have been informed. If nothing else, this will hopefully deter them from attempting to use any other stolen prescriptions they may have.

### **INFORM NHS ENGLAND!**

Email [england.yhcdao@nhs.net](mailto:england.yhcdao@nhs.net) providing details of the prescription, the prescriber and the prescription number (if applicable). This is so that the origin of the prescription can be traced, and NHS England can circulate an alert in case other stolen prescriptions are presented to other pharmacies.

If the medication is a Controlled Drug then you should also notify the Controlled Drug Accountable Officer, email: [england.yhcdao@nhs.net](mailto:england.yhcdao@nhs.net)

Also inform NHS Counter Fraud Service on 0800 068616 or <https://cfa.nhs.uk>

### **KEEP A RECORD!**

Record all the details, including a description of the person, and make a note of any telephone conversations. If there would have been any CCTV footage of the person presenting the prescription or when they returned to the pharmacy later, retain and quarantine this footage so that it can be provided to the police or at a later stage. If the police wish to take the original prescription away as evidence, retain a copy in the pharmacy.

### **CLAIM THE REWARD**

A pharmacy which identifies a forged prescription can claim a Reward Payment. To claim this payment, call the NHS Business Services Authority on 0800 068 6161. In order to qualify for the reward the forgery must have been reported to the police and a crime or FWIN number obtained.

If you need advice, or would like an article to be included in a future issue, please contact

[england.yhcdao@nhs.net](mailto:england.yhcdao@nhs.net)