

### Experiences of generic brand switching of medicines

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#### Why we did this study

Medicines are available in both branded and generic forms. For example, Nurofen<sup>R</sup> is the original brand of the medicine called ibuprofen. Examples of generic ibuprofen products are Nurofen<sup>R</sup>, Anadin Ibuprofen<sup>R</sup>, Boots Ibuprofen<sup>R</sup> or Calprofen<sup>R</sup>.

For a prescription for ibuprofen, the original brand or any of the generic brands could be supplied. The generic brand (manufacturer) of ibuprofen supplied against a prescription may also differ from month to month, because the pharmacist may change their supplier.

Changing from one generic brand to another is called generic brand switching.

In the UK, patients often experience generic brand switching because of pressures on cost and policies for the reimbursement of dispensed medicines.

#### What we wanted to find out

We wanted to explore the general public's attitudes and experience of generic brand switching, and its impact on adherence to their medicines.

#### What we did

We developed a questionnaire, with the help of the PIPS group, which included questions to find out about people's:

- attitudes to generic medicines
- experiences and attitudes to generic brand switching
- demographic characteristics.

#### Who we asked

We invited adults aged 18 years or over who were taking at least one regular prescription medicine. We used three different methods of recruitment and the number returned from each was:

- postal questionnaire to residents in sheltered housing – 52 returned (13% response rate)
- face to face distribution via street survey – 63 completed (21% response rate)
- face to face distribution via community groups – 46 returned (23% response rate)

The total number of questionnaires returned was 161. Roughly half were from men – 82 (51%).

The average was 70 and the respondents were mostly taking 5 medicines each day, but the range was from 1 to 29.

## **What we found out**

- 58% (94) agreed that generic medicines had the same effectiveness as the original brand
- 79% (90) trusted the judgement of the pharmacist in dispensing medicines for them
- 46% (74) believed that generic medicines had the same side-effects as the original brand
- 48% (55) would like the pharmacist to give them more information about the brand supplied

75% (114/152) had experienced brand switching, with 10% of these reporting that brand switching occurred as frequently as every month, and (66%, 75 participants) had experienced a switch at least twice a year.

28% (32/114) reported problems identifying their medicines following changes in the brand supplied.

## **What this means**

- The public are open minded towards receiving generic medicines, but many do believe there are differences in both efficacy and side effects.
- Difficulties were experienced in identifying medicines and perceived changes in efficacy or toxicity following brand changes.
- Pharmacists should be more proactive about informing people when a different brand has been supplied. They need to raise awareness that medicines may look different and they should help patients with identification, which could also possibly improve adherence.

## **How you can use this research**

Using a generic medicine is similar to buying branded goods or a supermarket's own label – both products do the same job, but the supermarket's own version is usually cheaper. Generic medicines go through the same detailed safety and quality requirements as the original branded product, so although they are cheaper than the original brand, they are just as safe and effective. But there are some differences in how they are made and it is possible that people may experience changes when they switch brands.

Always ask the pharmacist's advice if you think that your medicine looks different from before. It may be that the brand (manufacturer) of the medicine has changed. If you or someone you care for uses medicines regularly and think that you have had a problem with the medicine not working or more side effects, do talk to your pharmacist or doctor.