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20 Hartwell Gardens,
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10th March 2008

Ms Heather Gray,
Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management,
West Hertfordshire Primary Care Trust,
Charter House,
Parkway,
Welwyn Garden City,
Herts AL8 6JL

RECEIVED
12 MAR 2008

Dear Heather,

Supply of Gluten Free Food on Prescription

Mrs Deborah Ward, the Organiser for the Watford and Hemel Hempstead Coeliac Group wrote to Anne Walker the Chief Executive of the PCT on 28th January 2008 asking the Hertfordshire PCTs to consider adopting a scheme whereby patients can ask for repeat supplies of gluten free (GF) foods from a community pharmacy after referral from their GP.

Ms Walker wrote to Mrs Ward on February 25th suggesting that we could consider the Repeat Dispensing Scheme which was already included in the national contract for community pharmacy. Alternatively if we still wished to pursue the direct supply of gluten free foods we were advised to contact you. I telephoned you on behalf of our local group of coeliacs and we discussed today.

I agreed to send you details again of the Northamptonshire scheme which Mrs Ward's letter had proposed for adoption by the Hertfordshire PCTs, and a copy of the press release on this is attached. You mentioned concerns about possible extra costs and you will see that the provision of GF foods by pharmacists has to be in line with a local PCT guideline approved by Coeliac UK. I do not have a copy of this guideline but for information I attach a copy of the general prescribing guideline produced by a group of expert physicians and dieticians.

As I mentioned to you in our discussion I have certainly never been offered by either my current GP surgery or the previous one the facility of a 1 year repeat dispensing prescription to be held by a community pharmacy. Instead I have to make a request for them to renew my prescription, this currently takes 3 days or so, and it can then take up to a further week to obtain GF flour and fresh bread (10 days in all).

The Northamptonshire scheme would save the time needed to obtain a repeat prescription from the patient's GP. It would also allow the patient much more flexibility to change prescription GF items, as these would merely be requested from the community pharmacy that would be responsible for the supply, instead of having to contact the GP to do so.

A Coeliac UK patient survey of 750 members in Leeds, Cardiff, Birmingham and Reading found that only 8 out of 10 receive prescriptions. Of those who didn't get prescribed foods 43% said it "wasn't worth the hassle", and 7% reported that their GPs wouldn't prescribe the foods. Thus a simpler and easier system for obtaining GF foods might enable better patient compliance – which is very important since the only treatment for coeliac patients is a life-long gluten free diet. Poor compliance increases the risk for patients of contracting lymphoma and duodenal cancer.

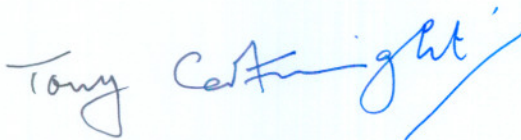
The Northamptonshire scheme is in accord with the DoH guideline to PCTs on '*Gluten-free foods – local options*', and is the second option in the section of that document entitled **Routes of supply** (copy attached for your ease of reference).

You had agreed to seek the views of the PCT's Practice Based Commissioning Groups (as fund holders) on our request.

Please let me know if you need any further information.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tony Cartwright". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

A.C. Cartwright