

# Special-Order liquid medications

A stepwise approach is suggested for patients who are unable to take medication in solid oral dosage forms:



## Step 1

**Is the medication needed?** The first consideration should be to determine if a medicine is needed at all. Any unnecessary medication should be stopped

Special-order products are unlicensed and are not required to meet the same standards as licensed preparations. They are considerably more expensive than licensed medicines and often have short shelf lives. Prescribers assume greater liability when using special order products.

## Step 2

**A licensed medicine in a suitable formulation** to meet the patient's needs should be used *first line* (e.g. a dispersible tablet, patch, buccal tablet or licensed liquid medicine)

Care staff may administer medicines in an unlicensed manner on the instruction of the prescriber. A written direction to crush or disperse tablets or to open capsules must be documented in the patient's care plan.

Care Quality Commission. October 2008. Accessed at [http://www.cqc.org.uk/guidanceforprofessionals/socialcare/careproviders/guidance.cfm?widCall1=customWidget.s.content\\_view\\_1&cit\\_id=2653](http://www.cqc.org.uk/guidanceforprofessionals/socialcare/careproviders/guidance.cfm?widCall1=customWidget.s.content_view_1&cit_id=2653) on 2/12/2009.

## Step 3

If there is no suitable licensed formulation either:

Consider switching to a different therapeutic agent in the same class, or to a different route of administration

OR

Consider using a licensed medicine in an unlicensed manner, for example by crushing tablets or opening capsules\*.

**You must first establish that the medicine is suitable for administration in this way**

However, where Nurses administer medicines in an unlicensed manner the Nurse takes professional responsibility despite the instruction from the prescriber.

\*For advice on the options for specific medicines use the hard copy of **The Newt Guidelines** (a copy was sent to every Rotherham practice) or follow the links below:

[http://www.formulary.cht.nhs.uk/Guidelines/MMC/062b\\_MedEnt\\_IndivDrugs.htm](http://www.formulary.cht.nhs.uk/Guidelines/MMC/062b_MedEnt_IndivDrugs.htm)

[www.nelm.nhs.uk/en/NeLM-Area/Evidence/Medicines-Q--A/Therapeutic-options-for-patients-unable-to-take-solid-oral-dosage-forms/](http://www.nelm.nhs.uk/en/NeLM-Area/Evidence/Medicines-Q--A/Therapeutic-options-for-patients-unable-to-take-solid-oral-dosage-forms/)

## Step 4

In the few situations where the patient's needs cannot be met by licensed medicines, the use of a special-order product ('special') may be considered.

In these instances ensure the strength of the special prescribed is a **tariff strength** where available<sup>#</sup>

<sup>#</sup>As of November 2011 The Drug Tariff now lists a selection of special order products commonly prescribed in the UK that have an agreed 'tariff' price. The inclusion of this list is an attempt to control the spiralling costs of specials: the list is **not** advocating the use of these products as first line; they are only to be used when the 3 options described here have been exhausted.

