



THE SCOTTISH OFFICE

NHS
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National Health Service in Scotland Management Executive

St. Andrew's House
Edinburgh EH1 3DG

Dear Colleague

WELFARE FOOD SCHEME
WELFARE FOOD DISTRIBUTION
HEALTH BOARD GUIDANCE FOR PHARMACISTS

16 April 1993

Summary

1. District Health Authorities and Trusts in England have experienced problems with large numbers of milk tokens issued in one area being surrendered in another.
2. In association with the Department of Health The Scottish Office Home and Health Department are issuing the attached guidance to promote good practice and to curb illegal claiming.

Action

3. Please circulate this letter, with the guidance, to all staff responsible for welfare food reimbursement. If you or your staff wish to discuss further, please contact John Alvin at the enquiry point either by telephone or writing.
4. This letter should be copied to unit General Managers for action.

Any information will be treated in confidence.

Yours sincerely

W SCOTT

Addressees:

For action:

General Managers,
Health Boards

For Information:

General Manager,
Common Services Agency

General Manager,
State Hospital

Chief Executives,
Designate, NHS Trusts

To be copied to Unit
General Managers for
action

Enquiries to:

J C T Alvin
HPPHD 1
Room 29E
St Andrew's House
EDINBURGH
EH1 3DE
Tel: 031-244 2449
Fax: 031-244 2683 (not
Secure)

COMMON SERVICES AGENCY	
RECEIVED	
22 APR 1993	
FILE NO.	
REFERRED TO	ACTION TAKEN

WELFARE FOOD DISTRIBUTION GUIDANCE

Several Health Authorities and Trusts in England, who use pharmacists as their agents to distribute welfare food, under the Welfare Food Regulations, have reported a large increase in the numbers of milk tokens surrendered, many of which appear to come from outside their area. There are also reports of an increase in the use of tokens by people who may not be genuine Income Support beneficiaries. The Department of Health and The Scottish Office Home and Health Department is concerned to reduce the risk of fraudulent claiming and to ensure that good practice is maintained within the Welfare Food Scheme. Furthermore, in view of the differing distribution arrangements between areas, we are particularly concerned that some Health Boards reimbursing out-of-area tokens may be bearing the administrative expenses of other areas where no arrangements have been made between the Health Board and pharmacists for the distribution of welfare foods.

We therefore advise Health Boards to take account of the following guidance to ensure good practice and to curb illegal claiming:

1. Health Board Guidance for Pharmacists

Health Boards should advise pharmacists that:

- They should not take more than two tokens from outside the area from any claimant on one day. Under normal circumstances, claimants visiting from another area would not bring with them more than two tokens stamped outside that area.
- Any claimant appearing regularly with out-of-area tokens or large numbers of tokens should be asked for proof of entitlement ie their Income Support order book or award letter, and the pharmacist should note the claimant's name, address and National Insurance number and report these to their Health Board.
- Tokens are only valid for the week in which they are issued and four weeks thereafter. Pharmacists should not, therefore, accept tokens which are more than five weeks old.
- Forging of tokens is attempted and that genuine tokens can be identified by the watermark which consists of a crown and the letters "HMSO". Pharmacists should not accept tokens which they suspect are forgeries.
- If a pharmacist is offered a suspected forgery, he should note any distinguishing features (for example, the location indicated on the date-stamp, the serial number, evidence of a watermark). If possible, without putting himself or his staff at risk, the pharmacist should also ask the claimant where he obtained the token and make a note of his name and address. These details should be reported to the Health Board who should then contact this Department.

2. Actions by the Health Board

- Health Board staff should challenge any pharmacist returning large numbers of tokens from outside the area, particularly if they are from neighbouring areas. This might indicate a "business to business" arrangement ie shopkeepers, milkmen or pharmacists from

other areas channelling tokens which they have accepted through the pharmacist for reimbursement.

- As Health Boards will be aware from the recent notice from the Department, they should maintain alertness at all times and refuse payment on any tokens they suspect to be forged, pending investigation. Any suspected forgeries or other suspicious circumstances should be reported immediately to the contact below. The suspicious consignment should be retained for inspection by the Department of Health's Fraud Prevention Officers.
- Health Boards should make it clear to pharmacists with whom they have entered into agency arrangements that the Health Board and The Scottish Office Home and Health Department will take a very serious view of any pharmacist who has knowingly involved himself in fraud or other abuse of the Welfare Food Scheme. Any pharmacist thought to have been fraudulent should be reported to this Department.

This letter should be circulated to all staff responsible for welfare food reimbursement.

March 1993