

Position Statement – Routine treatment of diagnosed vitamin B12 deficiency

Herts Valleys CCG does not support prescription of oral cyanocobalamin to treat diagnosed vitamin B12 deficiency

Recommendations

- For all patients with non-diet related vitamin B12 deficiency - **Provide 1 mg hydroxocobalamin intramuscular injection every 2 – 3 months.**
- For patients with diet related vitamin B12 deficiency – **Provide 1mg hydroxocobalamin injection every 6 months**, or if patients decline injection **advise OTC purchase of 50 microgram cyanocobalamin (vitamin B12) tablets** (inexpensive and available from pharmacies or online). Purchase is in line with Herts Valleys [CCG Over The Counter policy](#) and supported by NHS England.
- Review all patients prescribed 50 **microgram** and 1 **milligram** cyanocobalamin and suggest that these are purchased.

Background

At the beginning of the pandemic, national guidance from the British Society of Haematologists advised “*As an alternative [to injectable hydroxocobalamin for treating vitamin B12 deficiency], oral cyanocobalamin can be offereduntil regular IM hydroxocobalamin can be resumed, i.e. once GP surgeries are able to do so safely, aiming to have a shortest possible break from regular injections.*”

This guidance was intended to support practices and vulnerable patients in the first few, uncertain months of the pandemic and in July 2020, Herts Valleys CCG issued local guidance in line with the national guidance.

However ePACT2 data (see chart 1 overleaf) clearly demonstrates that spend on 50 **microgram** oral cyanocobalamin more than doubled at the start of the pandemic and prescribing has continued to be high. At the same time, spend on injectable 1mg hydroxocobalamin decreased by at least 50% and has also remained at that level.

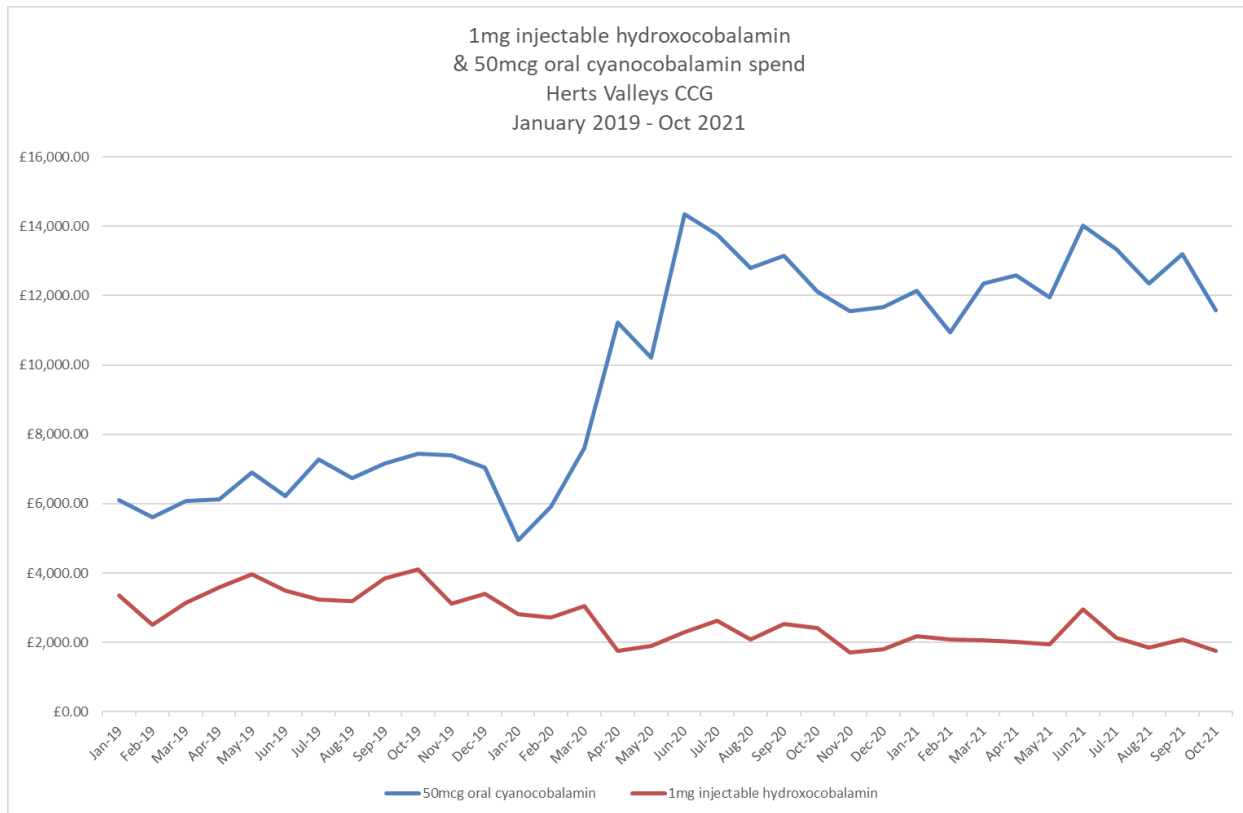
[NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary](#) (2020) advises that maintenance of diagnosed non-diet related vitamin B12 deficiency (i.e. due to pernicious anaemia, intrinsic factor deficiency or malabsorption) **requires administration of hydroxocobalamin 1 mg intramuscularly every 2–3 months for life** unless advised otherwise by a haematologist.

For patients with diagnosed non-diet related vitamin B12 deficiency, absorption of oral cyanocobalamin is unlikely to be adequate to treat deficiency in the long term, and oral cyanocobalamin is considerably more expensive than 1mg injectable hydroxocobalamin:

Drug	Prescribed as	Dose & frequency required	Cost per patient per year
Cyanocobalamin	50 x 50 mcg tablets = £15.52	1 – 3 tablets per day	£113.30 - £339.89
Hydroxocobalamin	5 x 1 mg/ml injection = £5.14	1mg injection every 2 – 3 months	£4.11 - £6.17

[NICE Clinical Knowledge Summary](#) (2020) also advises that for diagnosed (by blood test) vitamin B12 deficiency thought to be diet related “*people [should be advised] either to take oral cyanocobalamin tablets 50–150 micrograms daily between meals, or have a twice-yearly hydroxocobalamin 1 mg intramuscular injection*”.

Chart 1 - Herts Valleys CCG monthly spend 50mcg oral cyanocobalamin against 1mg injectable hydroxocobalamin



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