

## Position statement on the prescribing of probiotics

**In line with NHS England's guidance on conditions for which over-the-counter items should not be routinely prescribed,<sup>1</sup> SW London CCGs\* do not routinely support the prescribing of any probiotics for any indication.**

### Rationale

- VSL#3 is no longer available as a prescription product under the ACBS category for ileoanal pouchitis from 01 November 2018.
- The British Society of Gastroenterology guidelines for the management of inflammatory bowel disease in adults state that VSL#3<sup>®</sup> probiotic therapy may be used to treat and prevent pouchitis. Its efficacy is lost soon after stopping the treatment.<sup>2</sup>
- A Cochrane review investigated use of probiotics to treat active ulcerative colitis (UC). There is limited evidence that probiotics may reduce disease activity, but not enough to recommend them to treat active UC. Larger, well designed randomised controlled trials are needed to determine this.<sup>3</sup>
- There is no clear evidence to support any role of probiotics in the maintenance of Crohn's disease after surgically or medically-induced remission.<sup>2</sup>

### References

1. NHS England guidance for CCGs. Conditions for which over the counter items should not be prescribed routinely in primary care. <https://www.engage.england.nhs.uk/consultation/over-the-counter-items-not-routinely-prescribed/>
2. Mowat C, Cole A, Windsor A et al. IBD section of the British Society of Gastroenterology. Guidelines for the management of inflammatory bowel disease in adults. Gut 2011; 60(5): 571-607
3. Mallon PT, McKay D, Kirk SJ, Gardiner K. Probiotics for induction of remission in ulcerative colitis. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2007, Issue 4, Art No: CD005573.DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD005573.pub2. Available at: <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD005573.pub2/abstract>

### Guidance for clinicians

#### Recommendations

- Discontinue prescribing of all probiotics including VSL#3.
- Probiotics are available for purchase by patients over-the-counter if they wish, but advise patients about the lack of evidence of clinical benefit.

#### Guidance for patients, carers and guardians

- A lack of evidence for using probiotics means that your doctor will review your treatment.
- If you wish to continue your probiotic, you can purchase them without prescription, from a variety of pharmacies and health food shops.

**The NHS belongs to YOU, use it responsibly**

\*SWL CCGs (NHS Croydon CCG, NHS Kingston CCG, NHS Merton CCG, NHS Richmond CCG, NHS Sutton CCG and NHS Wandsworth CCG) position statement on probiotics