

Switching from varenicline (Champix) to an alternative stop smoking medication

Pfizer have informed us that they are suffering supply issues with varenicline (Champix) that are likely to last several weeks.

There is likely to be a need for clients currently using Champix to help them quit smoking, and who cannot access a full 12-week course of Champix, to use an alternative stop smoking medication.

There is little research evidence on switching from Champix to an alternative stop smoking medication, but many stop smoking practitioners will have been through this process with clients who have experienced side-effects with Champix and have wanted to use nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) instead.

Bupropion (Zyban) isn't an appropriate alternative for those clients already using Champix; **combination NRT would seem a reasonable alternative that can offer almost immediate relief of withdrawal symptoms and urges to smoke.**

Ideally **combination NRT** treatment would be used in the form of a nicotine patch in combination with a faster-acting product such as the nicotine lozenge, nasal spray or mouth spray. A **pre-quit measure of tobacco dependence** such as the Heaviness of Smoking Index (HSI) **can inform NRT dose**. Clients should be advised about possible side effects, how to manage them, and be **encouraged to use enough NRT to maintain abstinence from smoking**. They should be reassured that NRT is an evidence-based medication to help people stop smoking and that the change of treatment plan should in no way disadvantage them in their attempt to stop smoking.

Some clients may choose to try vaping (either alone or in combination with NRT), and if this is the case, they should be encouraged to see this as supportive of their quit attempt. As with NRT, they should use enough nicotine to prevent relapse to smoking and should buy a product from a reputable retailer, taking advice on what to buy and how to use it. If they remain smokefree, they can be counted as a quit on your monitoring system.

Any new clients starting a quit attempt should be advised to use an alternative stop smoking product (e.g. NRT or a vape) rather than begin a course of Champix at this time, given the uncertainty around supply.