Five examples of waste in the NHS

Prescribing medicines available over the counter

- Paracetamol: £87.6m
- Aspirin: £27.3m
- Ibuprofen: £27.1m

In 2015, the NHS in England spent £142 million on prescribing paracetamol, ibuprofen and aspirin.1

Over prescribing antibiotics

- Estimated saving per 100,000 population: £7.299
- Total saving to the NHS: £3.7m

The NHS also wastes a significant amount of money prescribing antibiotics for conditions where the modest benefits do not justify their use.2

Unnecessary A&E visits

- Cost of inappropriate A&E attendance: £290m
- Self treatable conditions responsible for 19.1% of A&E attendance in 2014

There is evidence to suggest that people are confused about which NHS service they need, leading to considerable inappropriate use of primary and secondary services.3

NHS 111 inefficiencies

- Evidence suggests that three quarters of people directed to A&E by the 111 helpline could have been helped elsewhere.4

Medicines reclassification

- £15.7m every year could be saved.5

The efficient reclassification of medicines, or ‘switching’, is an important way in which medicines are made readily available to support people to self care. However, there is evidence to show that the rate of switching has slowed down over time, potentially due to an increasingly strict interpretation of the regulation covering reclassification.6

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1 Health and Social Care Information Centre Prescription cost analysis, England, 2014/15
2 King’s Fund, Better value in the NHS, The role of changes in clinical practice, July 2015
3 IMS Health, Presentation of self treatable conditions (STCs) in A&E units in England – Executive Summary, 2015
5 Personal Social Services Research Unit, Unit Costs of Health & Social Care, 2011
6 George Freeman MP, answer to Written Question 33763