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The Scottish Conservatives are to support free prescriptions in Scotland as part of a major review into the use of drugs in the NHS.

In its manifesto ahead of the General Election, the party will support the current policy of providing prescriptions free of charge – because drugs are playing an increasing role in out-of-hospital care.

At the same time, the party's new Health Advisory Board – to be set up in the coming weeks – will carry out an assessment of the role of drugs, prescriptions and pharmacy services within the NHS.

The board will also examine the current use of so-called “low value prescriptions” such as over-the-counter drugs currently available from GPs.

The latest statistics show that the NHS is currently spending £10m on paracetamol, £2.9m on aspirin, £1.6m on sun cream and £1.8m on shampoo.

It was also study whether increasing the use of generic drugs and cutting down on wastage can save more money for the NHS.

The current NHS Scotland bill for drugs is £1.5 billion.

Scottish Conservative health spokesman Donald Cameron said:

“There is no doubt at all that people in Scotland value the idea of free prescriptions. We have listened to them and changed our policy.

“This really about the future of the NHS. Medical technology is making leaps and bounds. Drugs are becoming ever more sophisticated. Pharmacy services have the potential to help reduce the pressure on GPs and hospitals.

“However, we need to assess this issue thoughtfully. It means thinking about when prescriptions are the right answer and they they're not. It can't be right that the NHS spends £10m a year on over-the-counter drugs like paracetamol.

“So we need a comprehensive review of how drugs, medicine and prescriptions fit into the future of care. Our Health Advisory Board will carry out that work and will report back will in advance of the next Holyrood elections.”