

Does inhaler technique assessment and training matter anymore? Results of a request to all placebo producing pharmaceutical companies in the UK for placebo devices for a teaching session (ID 793) PCRS Conference 2026

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Background:

For many years inhaler technique training has been seen as an essential part of initiating new inhaler devices or reviewing patients. This is linked to associations of poor technique with increased risk of admission, more symptomatology and worse control of asthma and COPD. BTS / NICE / SIGN Guidelines in Asthma (2024) and NICE COPD Guidelines (2019, last reviewed 6/26) as well as GOLD and GINA guidance support the importance of inhaler technique training and review.

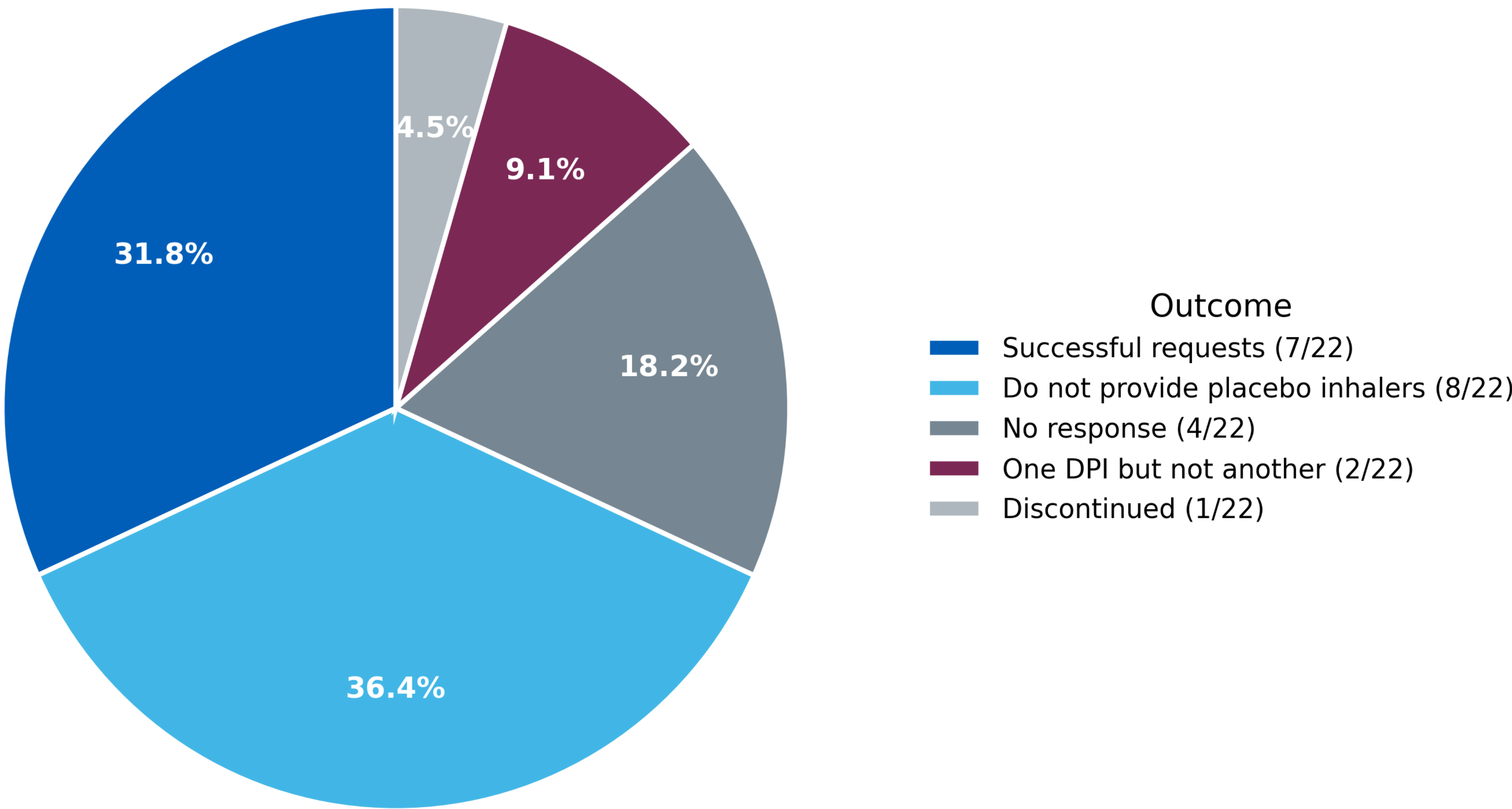
The author was requested to provide an all-day training session for General Practitioner Specialist Trainees (GPST) in Somerset (n=120) and wanted to ensure that some of the practicalities of inhaler technique were evident to all – providing them as far as possible with an example of each placebo inhaler device available.

Aim: To establish the availability of placebo devices for teaching clinicians (and by nature patients) in the current clinical environment.

Method:

- RightBreathe website was accessed to ascertain the number of different inhaler devices on the market in the UK. This was done in early April 2026.
- Pressure meter dose inhalers were requested by email from four pharmaceutical companies. Other differing devices were requested by email from every company who have these available for prescription in the UK. This was completed on the same day in April 2026
- The responses from the pharmaceutical companies were analysed as were the resultant delivery of placebo devices for training.
- The training day 24/6/2026 was attended by 110 GPST for the whole day (virtually all staying for the entire day)
- Results of the success in acquiring the devices is documented.

Requests for Dry Powder Devices / Non pMDI Inhalers



Results:
Placebo devices were received for 7/22 Dry Powder Devices / non pMDI devices – this is presented in the pie graph visually.
3 out of the 4 companies where pMDI inhalers were requested provided placebo devices
Of 13 companies producing non pMDI inhalers 6 did not provide placebos or did not respond (4,2 respectively), 5 provided dry placebos for all devices and 2 for some of the devices.

Discussion
This brief survey highlights that availability of placebo devices is not readily available for many of the licensed products available in the UK. This would make initiating people on treatment very challenging. It would be interesting to explore the companies reasons for this, the initiation of patients on such device without placebo training and how much evidence and current practice there is to guide to an online video as an alternative. If the initiation and review is deemed important in people with asthma and COPD then more expectation of use of placebo should be expected.

- Considerations and Questions**
- Do we believe inhaler device training is vital prior to initiating to ensure suitability or can we guess and review later?
 - Would we only recommend or prescribe inhaler devices where it is possible to train prior to the prescrtption?
 - What are the global impacts of placebo devices (both pressure meter dose inhalers and dry powder devices? And how can we address this?
 - How good is a link to show the patient how to use the device on line?

pMDI = pressured meter dose inhaler
DPI = Dry Powder Device
COPD = Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease
BTS = British Thoracic Society
NICE = National Institute for Clinical Excellence
SIGN = Scottish Intercollegiate Guideline Network
GOLD = Global Strategy for the Diagnosis, Management, and Prevention of COPD
GINA = Global Initiative for Asthma

“The most effective inhaler is the one the patient is able to use and wants to use well” – attributed to many great respiratory clinicians