

10 December 2009

Gateway Reference: 13101

Safer management and use of controlled drugs

Context

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) have issued the following information relevant to safe management and use of controlled drugs

- Reducing dosing errors with opioid medicines¹
- Ensuring safer practice with higher dose ampoules of morphine and diamorphine².
- Safer practice with epidural injections and infusions³

However, we are aware that incidents involving controlled drugs, that pose a threat to patient safety, still have the potential to occur.

PCT Accountable Officers should also be aware of David Colin-Thome's letter of 2 October 2009⁴ on

- PCTs contract and performance management arrangements for the delivery of out of hours primary care services.

Purpose

The purpose of this note is to re-emphasise these key messages to support AOs deliver their legal responsibility⁵ to secure the safe management and use of controlled drugs in their organisation, and those who deliver services on its behalf, with regard to best practice.

NPSA Guidance

This note re-emphasises the key messages provided by the NPSA that

- all staff should take the necessary steps to minimise the risk of error associated with the prescribing, dispensing and administration of opioids and high dose (30 mg or greater) of diamorphine or morphine ampoules

¹ Rapid Response Report. Reducing Dosing Errors with Opioid Medicines. NPSA/2008/RRR05. 4 July 2008

² Safer Practice Notice. Ensuring safer practice with higher dose ampoules of morphine and diamorphine. NPSA/2006/12. 25 May 2006

³ Patient Safety Alert. Safer Practice with epidural injections and infusions. NPSA/2007/21. 28 March 2007

⁴ David Colin-Thome's letter of 2 October 2009. Out of Hours Primary Care Services: PCTs' Contract and Performance Management Arrangements. DH Gateway reference 12667

⁵ The Controlled Drugs (Supervision of Management and Use) Regulations 2006. SI 3148 2006. Regulation 9

- when opioid medicines are prescribed, dispensed or administered, in anything other than acute emergencies, the healthcare practitioner concerned, or their clinical supervisor should confirm recent opioid dosage, formulation, frequency of administration, that were a dose increase is intended that it is safe for the patient and ensure they as healthcare practitioner's are familiar with the characteristics of the medicine and its formulation
- ensure that for all epidural injections and infusions medicines and devices are labelled, stored and used in such a way that manages associated risks and protects patient safety
- local medicine and prescribing policies, including Standard Operating Procedures and those of all relevant organisations delivering healthcare services on behalf of your organisation should reflect the NPSA's guidance.

It is important to note that the NPSA's guidance is not designed to restrict clinical use but to ensure that they are used in a way that is as safe as possible for patients.

David Colin Thome's letter of 2nd October 2009

This highlighted the update finding from the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) independent enquiry into Take Care Now's (TCNs) provision of out of hours GP services. CQC expects to publish its report on the enquiry later this year

While the scope of CQC's current enquiry is limited to a specific number of PCTs and a particular provider, the Department strongly supports their recommendations, which are relevant to **all commissioners**. PCTs should have robust performance management arrangements in place to ensure their OOH service, like any other commissioned service, is delivering against contractual requirements.

This includes the particular risks associated with the management of medicines in an out of hours service, especially in respect of controlled drugs. The delivery of this should be supported by the existing work that AOs to deliver their legal responsibility⁶ to secure the safe management and use of controlled drugs in their organisation, and those who deliver services on its behalf, with regard to best practice.

Chris Harris
Department of Health
Controlled Drugs Policy Lead

⁶ The Controlled Drugs (Supervision of Management and Use) Regulations 2006. SI 3148 2006. Regulation 9