

Medicines matters

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Improving adherence to amitriptyline

Escalating the dose of amitriptyline too quickly can cause patients to develop intolerable side effects and make them reluctant to continue treatment, according to West Hampshire CCG in its February 2017 [newsletter](#). Given that the alternative treatments for neuropathic pain are potentially addictive, the CCG recommends starting amitriptyline at 5mg daily and increasing the daily dose by 5-10mg increments every two weeks.

Lactulose review

In its February 2017 newsletter, North West Surrey CCG reminds prescribers that lactulose's mode of action requires patients to ingest adequate volumes of fluid for the drug to be effective. It also points out that it can cause bloating and colic if used alone for opioid-induced constipation, and that it is not recommended for patients with irritable bowel syndrome. As such, the CCGs says, lactulose should be reserved for patients with hepatic encephalopathy and those who fail to respond to other laxatives.

Community pharmacists to receive admission notification

Refer-to-Pharmacy, an electronic system developed in East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust that allows hospital discharge letters to be sent electronically to a patient's usual community pharmacy, has been updated to allow admission notifications to be sent. It allows hospital pharmacy staff to inform their community colleagues of a patient's admission — to help prevent prescriptions being unnecessarily requested and dispensed while a patient is in hospital. More information in the system can be found on the ELH Trust [website](#).

Savings to be made from carbocisteine sachets

For patients who are unable to take carbocisteine capsules, the drug is also available as solution or sachets. The February 2017 [edition](#) of the Derbyshire Medicines Management newsletter highlights that prescribing a 750mg dose using sachets is currently £14.66/month cheaper than prescribing it as a solution.

Opioid liquid overdose error highlighted

In its February 2017 [newsletter](#), the Northern Ireland Medicines Management team make prescribers aware of a recent medication error involving concentrated morphine (20mg/ml) liquid. Although the bottle was labelled as "Take

20mg when required for pain relief every 4 to 6 hours", the patient's family misinterpreted the instructions and gave a 20ml (400mg) dose. The team recommends only using high-strength opioid liquids where patients are unable to swallow large volumes of liquid. They also recommend specifying the dose in ml and mg on the prescription and label (ie, "Take 1ml (20mg) when required") to facilitate patient understanding.

Are you competent at checking inhaler technique?

The UK Inhaler Group has produced a [document](#) intended to support and assess the standards of healthcare professionals who initiate inhaled therapies and check inhaler technique. It describes the seven steps of good inhaler technique and offers an example of a healthcare professional competency assessment.

E-cigarettes soon to be available on NHS prescription

According to Doncaster CCG, e-cigarette brand E-Voke will soon be marketed as being available on NHS prescription. Ahead of this, in its recent [newsletter](#), the CCG advises GPs not to prescribe e-cigarettes and to signpost patients who request e-cigarettes instead to local smoking cessation services.

New fluoxetine formulations available

The current range of available fluoxetine formulations is summarised by Dorset CCG in its February 2017 [newsletter](#). It is now possible to obtain 10mg, 30mg and 40mg capsules, along with 20mg dispersible tablets. The CCG points out that the dispersible tablets are not only cheaper than 20mg/5ml liquid, they are also scored — meaning, at £3.44 per 28 tablets, they are considerably cheaper than the 10mg capsules (£65.63 for 30 caps).

Everything you ever wanted to know about treating reflux in infants

Northern Ireland Medicines Management team has produced a 4-page [guide](#) on the use of proton pump inhibitors or ranitidine to treat infant reflux. The guide includes dosing summary tablets and information on how to avoid the unnecessary use of unlicensed specials.

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