Safety Notice 001/20

Safe provision of sedating medicines on discharge from NSW Health facilities

18 February 2020

Distributed to:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance

Action required by:

- Chief Executives
- Directors of Clinical Governance

We recommend you also inform:

- Directors of Pharmacy
- Directors of Emergency Departments
- Directors of Nursing

Expert Reference Group

Content reviewed by:

- Medication Safety Expert Advisory Committee
- Chief Pharmacist Unit, Ministry of Health
- Alcohol and Other Drugs Branch, Ministry of Health

Clinical Excellence Commission

Tel. 02 9269 5500
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Email:
CEC-MedicationSafety@health.nsw.gov.au

Internet Website:
http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/sabs

Intranet Website
http://internal.health.nsw.gov.au/quality/sabs/

Review date

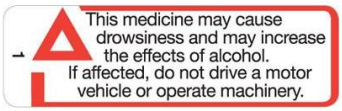
February 2021

Background

It is known that patients' fitness to drive may be impaired after receiving sedating medicines, placing them at higher risk of motor vehicle accidents. Patients administered and/or supplied with sedating medicines on or prior to discharge from NSW Health facilities (including Emergency Departments (EDs)) as well as carers accompanying them, must be given appropriate advice regarding adverse effects and impact on fitness to drive. Note that patients who have been administered medicines with sedating properties may experience effects for some time (even after the medication has been ceased).

Sedation warning labels

Take home medicines supplied to any patient must comply with labelling requirements in the Poisons Standard including requirements for sedation warnings and child resistant packaging[1]. Commercially available ancillary labels may be used by the pharmacy service, such as the example label illustrated below.



Use pre-packs prepared by the Pharmacy service for patient safety

Wherever possible, medicines commonly supplied from NSW Health facilities (such as EDs) for patient take home use should be pre-packed by the pharmacy service. Drug and Therapeutics Committees (DTCs) should have oversight of medicines and suitable unit quantities permitted for pre-pack supply, appropriate situations for supply, methods to monitor use and documentation of patient advice provided.

Where a medicine is not dispensed on a prescription by the pharmacy service and is supplied directly to a patient, the obligations for compliant packaging, labelling and appropriate counselling (including adverse effects) lie with the medical officer or nurse practitioner making the direct supply[2]. Under 'Emergency After Hours Supply By Registered Nurses in Rural and Remote Areas' provisions, a prescriber may remotely authorise supply of a medication by telephone (the medication must be pharmacy pre-packed and on the Drug and Therapeutics Committee approved list of medications for emergency supply). If this is the case, the prescriber then delegates counselling to the registered nurse.

Written information should be provided with the pre-pack e.g. the approved Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) leaflet for the medicine and, where relevant, the Driving Safety and Medicines fact sheet.

Footnotes

1. Child-resistant packaging should be difficult for young children to open but not for most adults. It is intended to provide a delay in the time taken by a child to open a package, thereby increasing the probability of adult intervention before the contents are fully accessible. If in the opinion of the prescribing medical officer or nurse practitioner, the patient/carer would suffer undue hardship through difficulty in opening child resistant packaging, the sedating medicine may be supplied in non-child-resistant packaging. This fact should be documented in the patient record.
2. Note that certain Schedule 8 medicines cannot be supplied for patient take-home use without a NSW Health Authority. This includes supply of any Schedule 8 medicine to a drug dependent person, or to a patient for whom another doctor currently holds a NSW Health Authority, or supply of a Schedule 8 psychostimulant to any person.

Suggested actions by Local Health Districts/Networks

1. Distribute this notice to all relevant staff and clinical departments.

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2. Ensure that all medicines supplied for take home use (whether dispensed by the pharmacy service or supplied directly by the medical officer) comply with the Medication Handling in NSW Health Facilities Policy Directive, local policies and the Poisons Standard, including:
    a. Requirements for Child-Resistant Packaging under Therapeutics Goods Order. 95 (Medicines coded with 'KIDCAP' in the eHealth Hospital Pharmacy Product List Warning Codes).
    b. Requirements for sedation warnings on the label in Appendix K of the Poisons Standard.

3. Ensure that patients administered and/or supplied with sedating medicines on or prior to discharge from NSW Health facilities, and carers accompanying them, are provided with appropriate advice on sedation and fitness to drive:
    a. At a minimum, this should include verbal advice from the discharging clinician or pharmacist regarding potential drowsiness, effects of consuming alcohol and impact on fitness to drive or operate machinery.
    b. Ensure that written information such as *Driving Safety and Medicines Factsheet: Patient Information* or Consumer Medicines Information (CMIs) are provided to patients, if required.

4. If medicines are regularly supplied by medical officers or nurse practitioners (or delegates) directly to patients:
    a. Ensure that systems are in place for safe supply of medicines such as pharmacy pre-packs, or pre-filled dispensing labels, compliant with regulation and policy, with oversight from the local DTC.
    b. Ensure that staff are trained on legal requirements associated with supply of medicines for take home use and professional obligations to provide medicines with appropriate packaging, labelling and advice (including adverse effects).
    c. Ensure that systems are in place to document medicines supplied and advice provided.

5. Ensure that DTCs periodically review supply of take home medicines and effectiveness of systems in place.

6. Confirm receipt of this notice to CEC-MedicationSafety@health.nsw.gov.au