Patient Safety Alert

Non-Luer Spinal (Intrathecal) Devices For Chemotherapy and Lumbar Puncture

November 2013

Alert reference number:	Gateway ref 00739
Alert type:	Three
Alert stage:	Three

This Alert updates previous Patient Safety Alerts issued in 2009 and 2011

Background

Deaths and severe harm have occurred in the NHS and worldwide from the wrong route administration of intravenous chemotherapy by the spinal and intrathecal route. Whilst there have been no incidents reported in England since 2001, deaths continue to occur in Europe and worldwide. These occurrences are required to be reported as 'Never Events' in the NHS in England.

In order to minimise risks of wrong route administration, The National Patient Safety Agency issued two Alerts (2009, 2011) recommending the use of connectors that cannot connect with intravenous Luer or infusion devices connectors for spinal (intrathecal), epidural and regional clinical procedures, when suitable devices became available. Target implementation dates of 1st April 2012 for spinal (intrathecal) bolus (Part A), and 1st April 2013 for epidural and infusion (Part B) devices, were identified.

Chemotherapy and lumbar puncture procedures

A complete range of non-Luer devices is now available for spinal (intrathecal) bolus chemotherapy and lumbar puncture and many NHS Trusts have already successfully implemented the use of these new devices. Non- compliant NHS Trusts are now advised to implement the previous NPSA Alerts in relation to intrathecal chemotherapy and lumbar puncture procedures within 3 months of this Alert. NHS Trusts should be aware that non-compliance could be a breach of Care Quality Commission Standards and could lead to regulatory action by other agencies.

Anaesthetic and non-chemotherapeutic procedures

Full compliance with the previous NPSA Alerts in anaesthetic and non-chemotherapeutic practice is currently not possible, as the range of non-Luer and infusion devices for spinal, epidural and regional procedures remains incomplete. New products, especially infusion products, are still awaited from industry. Continued use of noncompliant devices should be recorded in the organisation's risk register, with additional safety precautions taken and suitable safer devices introduced into practice as soon as they are available.

Actions

Who: All NHS organisations / health economies in all healthcare sectors

When: Actions completed 3 months after Alert publication

1. All spinal (intrathecal) chemotherapy bolus doses should be performed using syringes and needles and other devices with non-Luer connectors that cannot connect with intravenous devices.
2. All lumbar puncture procedures should performed using non-Luer devices.
3. In order to achieve the above, the range of new devices should be evaluated locally and action taken to minimise any potential practice risks arising from the use of the new devices.
4. It is expected that the continued use of non-compliant devices for chemotherapy will be exceptional, well documented and will appear on the organisation's risk register. Information on the continued use of devices in this category should be reported to NHS England. Trusts may wish to obtain legal advice on the implications of continued use of non-compliant devices.

Supporting information

More detailed information to support the implementation of this guidance is available at: www.england.nhs.uk/patientsafety

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