



Prescribing Safety Alert Notice

Reducing the risks of errors with prednisolone prescribing



SAN02

October 2015

Introduction

For several years, the National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) has reported that the wrong strength of a medication has been a common source of drug errors. Safer practices are encouraged to make prescribing as safe as possible to minimise risk to patients.

Previously the Coventry & Warwickshire Area Prescribing Committee (APC) has taken steps to reduce the risk of prescribing errors by limiting the strengths of tablets prescribed:

- Methotrexate tablets should only be prescribed as 2.5mg tablets ([SCA023](#))
- Warfarin tablets should only be prescribed as 1mg and 3mg tablets to avoid any errors with 5mg and 0.5mg strengths ([SAN01](#))

Prednisolone

Recently, several additional strengths of prednisolone tablets have been made available with the potential for errors. There are now 9 different tablet strengths/formulations and in addition there are liquid formulations available.

The Coventry and Warwickshire Area Prescribing Committee have agreed that strengths of prednisolone tablets used locally should be restricted to reduce the potential risk of prescribing, dispensing and administration errors.

Approved for Use

Standard 1mg and 5mg tablets
Tablets can be dissolved in water for children/swallowing difficulties

Restricted Use

2.5mg tablets where 5mg tablets cannot be halved for a 2.5mg dose
25mg tablets - Specialist Only, not for use in primary care (NB - these are expensive)

Not recommended

Standard 10mg and 20mg tablets
Enteric coated 2.5mg and 5mg tablets - no evidence of benefit [see NICE evidence summary](#)
Soluble 5mg tablets – dissolve standard tablets in water

Children and patients with swallowing difficulties

For children and those with swallowing difficulties, standard 1mg and 5mg tablets are very small and often easily swallowed, but may be dispersed in water¹ (unlicensed use) and some patients also find this more palatable than soluble tablets.

Currently, soluble tablets are considerably more expensive than standard tablets. Each 5mg soluble tablet costs £1.78, as opposed to £1.24 for 28 standard 5mg tablets². Although the use of standard tablets is outside of licence, the APC has considered that this is the most cost effective way of prescribing prednisolone for children/those with swallowing difficulties where dose permits. This is in line with decisions taken by other hospital trusts, children's hospitals and CCGs.

Where there are any difficulties with dissolving standard tablets, there is a prednisolone liquid 10mg/1ml available, but also a unit dose formulation prednisolone dompe® which is available as 5mg in 5ml single dose units. Both cost more than the standard tablets (although less than soluble tablets). There is also the possibility of errors as the two solutions come in different strengths, thus making it safer to use the standard tablets wherever possible.

References:

1. Newt Guidelines: <http://newtguidelines.com>
2. Drug Tariff October 2015: <http://www.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/PrescriptionServices/4940.aspx>