

Jim Livingstone
Director of Safety, Quality and Standards



Department of
**Health, Social Services
and Public Safety**

www.dhsspsni.gov.uk

AN ROINN
**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRIE O
**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin
an Fowk Siccar**

For action:

SABS Liaison Officers:

- to acknowledge receipt by 30 November 2008
- to indicate action underway by 16 December 2008
- to confirm completion by 8 May 2009

Chief Executives of HSC Trusts
Medical Directors HSC Trusts for cascade to:

- consultant oncologists
- CSCG leads
- all relevant staff

Clinical Director, NI Cancer Centre
Chief Executives HSS Boards
Chief Pharmacists in HSC Trusts/Boards
Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (for cascade to relevant regulated establishments and independent hospitals, clinics and hospices)

For information:

Medical Director NIAS
Directors of Nursing HSS Boards/HSC Trusts
Directors of Public Health in HSS Boards
Leader, NI Medicines Governance Team

Professor Sean Gorman, Head of School of Pharmacy, QUB
Regional Medicines Information Service
HSC Chief Executive
General Manager, HSC Safety Forum
Chief Executives NIMDTA, NICPPET, NIPEC

Dear Colleague

- (1) **National Patient Safety Agency: Rapid Response Report 4: Using Vinca Alkaloid Minibags (Adult/Adolescent Units)**
- (2) **HSC 2008/001 Updated national guidance on the safe administration of intrathecal chemotherapy**

Status: For Immediate Action by HSC Trusts & Independent Sector

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Our ref: HSC(SQSD) 61/2008

Date: 25 November 2008

1. **National Patient Safety Agency: Rapid Response Report 4: Using Vinca Alkaloid Minibags (Adult/Adolescent Units)**

- 1.1 NPSA RRR0004 advises that there have been further reports of fatal and serious incidents from hospitals outside the UK in which doses of vinca alkaloids intended for intravenous administration have been administered by the intrathecal (spinal) route in error. These include three cases where doses of vincristine had been diluted to 10ml and 20ml in syringes.
- 1.2 This guidance applies to all staff who prescribe, dispense or administer intravenous vinca alkaloid chemotherapy to adult and/or teenage patients. The Department recommends that Chief Executives should nominate their respective Chief Pharmacist/Head of Pharmacy and Medicines Management to lead the action required to implement the safer practice recommendations listed in this Rapid Response Report.

It is important that there is a clear separation of processes for patients under 16 years and those over 16 years, particularly if treatment is being given in a common environment.

Treatment of Children in Paediatric Units (aged 0 to 16 years)

- 1.3 This guidance does not apply to children and teenagers being treated in a paediatric unit. Doses of vinca alkaloids for all patients treated in dedicated paediatric settings should be administered from syringes, regardless of the age of the patient. Practice in paediatric units should remain unchanged.

Treatment of Teenagers, Adolescents and Adults in other settings (over 16 years)

- 1.4 When vinca alkaloids are prescribed, dispensed or administered in adult or adolescent units:
- Doses in syringes should no longer be used.
 - The prescribed dose should be supplied from the hospital pharmacy ready to administer in a 50ml minibag of sodium chloride 0.9% (for some brands of vinorelbine glucose 5% solution for injection may be used instead of sodium chloride 0.9%).
 - The following warning should be prominently displayed on the label of **ALL** vinca alkaloid doses 'For Intravenous Use Only – Fatal If Administered by Other Routes'.
 - There should be judicious use of colour and design on the label, outer packaging and delivery bags to further differentiate minibags containing vinca alkaloids from other minibag infusions. The Department will write to NPSA seeking standardisation of label colouring. In the meantime vigilance should be exercised with existing colourations.
 - The vinca minibag should be infused intravenously over 5 - 10 minutes and the patient closely monitored for signs of extravasation. Incidents of extravasation should be reported and shared via the National

Extravasation Information Service (www.extravasation.org.uk).

- Chemotherapy policies and procedures should be amended to reflect these requirements.
- Staff should be alerted and trained to follow the new practice.
- Practice should be audited to ensure compliance with the revised safety procedure.

2. HSC 2008/001 Updated national guidance on the safe administration of intrathecal chemotherapy

- 2.1 The Department of Health (DoH) has updated its national guidance on the safe administration of intrathecal chemotherapy. Its Health Service Circular HSC 2008/001 should be read in conjunction with the NPSA RRR004 (*Using Vinca Alkaloid Minibags (Adult/Adolescent Units)*).
- 2.2 This guidance sets out the minimum that should be expected of an NHS Trust providing an intrathecal chemotherapy service. It also sets out what to do in the exceptional circumstance where an intrathecal chemotherapy procedure needs to take place in a Trust that should not normally provide this service.

3. Required action:

- 3.1 Trusts (and independent sector, where appropriate) should take immediate action to implement NPSA Rapid Response Report 4 and the revised guidance on safe administration of intrathecal chemotherapy. The **action should be completed by 8 May 2009** and assurance provided via the Safety Alert and Broadcast System.
- 3.2 You will wish to bring the contents of this document to the attention of staff, particularly those involved in governance and risk management within your organisation. Organisations need to be aware of this safer practice notice in order to assist in complying with the *Quality Standard for Health & Social Care* –
- Criteria 4.3(i) and 5.3.1(a) (the appropriate management of risk);
 - Criterion 5.3.1(f)(viii) and (ix) (ensuring safe practice in medicines management, particularly in areas of high risk such as intrathecal chemotherapy); and
 - Criterion 5.3.3(f) (implementation of evidence-based practice through guidance, for example, NPSA guidance).

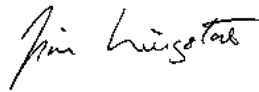
The NPSA RRR004 issued on 11 August 2008 is available on:

<http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/nrls/alerts-and-directives/rapidrr/using-vinca-alkaloid-minibags/>

The DoH's revised guidance on the safe administration of intrathecal chemotherapy is available on:

http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Lettersandcirculars/Healthservice/circulars/DH_086870

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jim Livingstone". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr J F Livingstone
Safety, Quality and Standards Directorate