



Chief Executives, HSS Trusts, for cascade to:

- Medical Directors
- Nursing Directors
- Pharmacy Directors
- Governance Leads

Chief Executive designate, HSC Authority

Regional Director, Public Health

Chief Executives, HSS Boards for cascade to

- Directors of Nursing
- Directors of AHP Services;
- Directors of Pharmacy
- Directors of Primary Care

Chief Executives, Special Agencies

Chief Executive, RQIA, for cascade to:

- the independent sector
- relevant regulated establishments

Chief Officers, HSC Councils

Medicines Governance Team

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Policy for the Safe Use of Oral Methotrexate in Secondary Care

In July 2005, the Department under Circular HSS(MD)22/2005 issued guidance to improve the safe use of oral methotrexate in primary and secondary care. Since that time a considerable body of work has been undertaken to address the recommendations and the Department wishes to acknowledge the commitment made in this response.

The oral methotrexate policy, issued to Trusts in 2003, has been reviewed and updated in accordance with these recommendations and the NPSA patient safety alert *Improving compliance with oral methotrexate guidelines* (June 2006).

The policy remains applicable to secondary care only, due to the different prescribing and dispensing arrangements that exist between the primary and secondary care settings.

In comparison with the original policy, the revised document provides a more comprehensive list of actions which promote safe practices for the prescribing, administration, dispensing and monitoring of patients receiving oral methotrexate. The updated policy re-enforces that Trusts stock only the 2.5mg strength of methotrexate to avoid confusion with the 10mg formulation and prevent such incidents from re-occurring. It also reminds staff that the 10mg/5ml must be the only strength of liquid methotrexate used.

It should be noted that these additional safety steps are unique to Northern Ireland; they are not included within the NPSA patient safety alert. These extra measures demonstrate Northern Ireland's commitment to ensure safe medicine practices.

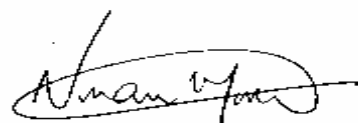
The Department has endorsed this policy and trusts should ensure compliance with the policy in the interest of patient safety. In this regard the continued support of Drug and Therapeutics Committees and the Regional Group on Specialist Medicines working with the Medicines Governance Team is necessary to ensure full implementation of this policy within trusts.

The Department is grateful to the Medicines Governance Team for updating this policy and for their continued work to promote medication safety

Yours sincerely



Dr Maura Briscoe
Safety, Quality and Standards Directorate



Dr Norman Morrow
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer