

Dr Jim Livingstone
Director of Safety, Quality and Standards

Dr Norman Morrow
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer



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**

Castle Buildings
Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 90522788
Fax: 028 90520725

Email: jim.livingstone@dhsspsni.gov.uk

Date: 22 December 2009

For Information to:

- Chief Executive, HSC Board
- Director of Commissioning, HSC Board
- Chief Executives, HSC Trusts for cascade to:
 - *Medical Directors*
 - *Directors of Pharmacy*
 - *Directors of Nursing*
 - *CSCG leads*
- Chief Executive RQIA for cascade to:
 - *Independent hospitals and clinics*
- Chief Executive, Public Health Agency
- Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency
- Assistant Director, Pharmacy and Medicines Management, HSC Board
- Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency
- Director of Performance Management & Service Improvement, HSC Board
- Assistant Director of Performance Management, HSC Board
- Professor David Woolfson, Head of School of Pharmacy, QUB
- Professor Linda Johnston, Head of Nursing & Midwifery, QUB
- Professor Hugh McKenna, Head of Life and Health Sciences, UU
- Dr Owen Barr, Head of School of Nursing, UU
- Professor Paul McCarron, Head of School of Pharmacy, UU
- Director, Safety Forum
- Lead, NI Medicines Governance Team
- General Practitioners
- Community Pharmacists
- Chief Executive, NICPPET
- Chief Executive, NIPEC

Dear colleague

NPSA: SAFETY IN DOSES – IMPROVING THE USE OF MEDICINES IN THE NHS

I am writing to alert you to, and commend, the National Patient Safety Agency's (NPSA) *Safety in Doses – Improving the use of medicines in the NHS* report issued on 3 September 2009. The report identifies risks and areas for action based on a detailed analysis of medication incidents across the NHS in England and Wales.

Safety in Doses highlights many issues that apply equally to Northern Ireland and to which the NI Medicines Governance Team have commented on in the past. While it is acknowledged that a significant amount of work is underway, in relation to medicines risk management across the HSC, I would encourage your consideration of the NPSA's recommendations in any future initiatives. These include:

1. Reviewing the number and completeness of medication incident reports received locally and identifying whether current arrangements are enabling local learning and taking action to minimise the risk of harm to patients;
2. Using the information and examples in the report to risk assess and, where necessary, improve the safety of local medication management systems;
3. Continuing to review previously implemented NPSA safer practice recommendations to ensure that robust implementation is maintained;
4. Implementing local risk reduction strategies that focus on minimising the high medication risks for children. These include:
 - neonatal medication errors;
 - dose calculation errors for all children; and
 - risks associated with poor documentation of medication use and the safe use of paracetamol, gentamicin, morphine, vaccines, insulin products and intravenous fluids;
5. Promoting initiatives to help reduce medication incidents involving elderly patients, such as a review of local arrangements for managing medication-related therapy for patients with swallowing difficulties and processes associated with medication concordance and compliance in elderly patients, particularly the use of patients' own medicines and compliance aids.

Safer medication is everybody's business and small changes can make a real difference in reducing harm to patients. It is hoped that the findings in the report will help you to reflect on the effectiveness of local systems to prevent similar incidents from occurring across the HSC.

The NPSA report can be accessed on:

<http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/patientsafety/alerts-and-directives/directives-guidance/safety-in-doses/>

Yours sincerely



Dr Jim Livingstone
Director, Safety, Quality & Standards



Dr Norman Morrow
Chief Pharmaceutical Officer