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Medicines Safety Alert

To: All Pharmaceutical Contractors

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Dear Colleague

RE: Risks when dispensing oral liquid medicines & oral syringes

I am writing to alert you to the risks of errors that can arise when issuing oral syringes for use with oral liquid medicines.

There has been a recent incident involving a prescription for a liquid medicine issued for a child requiring a dose less than 0.5ml. The oral syringe issued with the medicine was a 5ml oral syringe that did not allow accurate measurement of the prescribed dose. The child received an over dose of the medicine over a significant period of time before the error was identified. This incident could have been avoided by use of a smaller size oral syringe, with graduations that allow practical and accurate measurement the required dose.

Local pharmaceutical wholesalers stock a range of sizes of oral syringes, including 1ml, 3ml and 5ml. The smaller sized oral syringes, which are used less often, are available in small packs or single packs to avoid bulk buying and cost less than £1 each (only the 5ml size oral syringe is currently on NI Drug Tariff)

The Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland Code of Ethics requires a clinical assessment of every prescription to be undertaken by the pharmacist to determine the suitability of the medicine and its dose and that the patient receives sufficient advice and information to enable safe and effective use of the medicine. The dispensing pharmacist has a professional duty to ensure that the medicine dose can be given safely and accurately for all oral liquid medicines.

Recommended actions:

- Ensure that the prescribed dose can be measured accurately when supplying an oral syringe.
- Keep smaller sized oral syringes in stock for use in babies/children and for very small doses.
- Ensure that patients or carers know how to use an oral syringe and advise on the exact measurement to deliver the prescribed dose.

Please be vigilant when supplying oral syringes and ensure that protocols and procedures are in place to make the supply of medicines as safe as possible.

Yours sincerely



J Brogan

Mr Joe Brogan
Asst Director Integrated Care
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