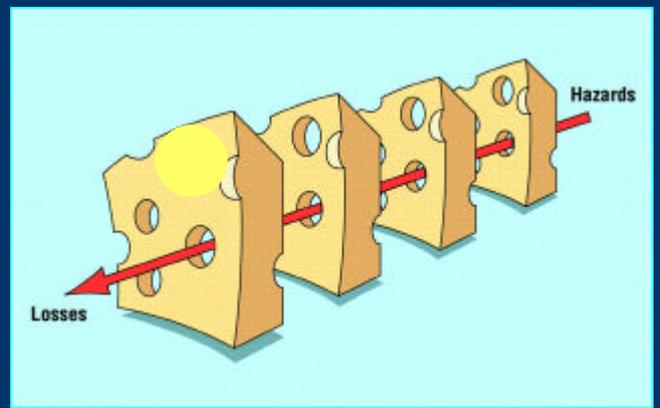


Medication Safety Today



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Sweet or salty?



Many IV medicines can be infused in either sodium chloride 0.9% or glucose 5%. However this should never be assumed. Medication incidents have been reported where an IV medicine has been infused using an incompatible infusion fluid.

Always check reference sources e.g. the package insert, the Summary of Product Characteristics, Appendix 6 of the BNF or contact Medicines Information/Pharmacy for information on compatible infusion fluids.

Which of the following injectable medicines are **not** compatible with sodium chloride 0.9%?

1. Digoxin
2. Amiodarone
3. Disodium pamidronate
4. Rifampicin
5. Mycophenolate mofetil

Answers at the bottom of the page.



Not 'u' again

You will often hear that when prescribing, 'units' should not be abbreviated to 'u'. While this may seem like a minor detail, a Liverpool coroner's court was recently told that this abbreviation was a factor in the death of a two-and-a-half month old baby¹. The baby was prescribed '1500u' of heparin. The 'u' was misread as an extra zero and 15,000 units of heparin was administered.

This tragic case is a reminder of why 'units' or 'international units' must never be abbreviated to 'u' or 'iu'.

¹ http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=423983&in_page_id=1770

Answers: (2) Amiodarone and (5) Mycophenolate mofetil

Yesterday's news



Always use the current edition of reference texts.

The use of outdated texts for medicines can be a contributing factor in medication incidents. Each updated edition will contain revised and new information.

In the BNF for example, these are highlighted in an accompanying leaflet and a section at the front of each new edition entitled 'Changes for this edition'.

What's that in old money?

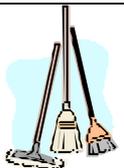


Medication incidents have been reported where a child's weight in imperial measurement has inadvertently been documented in metric units. For example 16lb 3 oz (7.3kg) recorded as 16.3kg. Paediatric doses are usually weight based and so this could lead to at least a two-fold overdose.

Safety tips

- ✔ If told a weight in imperial units, always convert to kilograms and have this double checked. Conversion charts are available.
- ✔ Weighing scales should always measure in kilograms only.
- ✔ Always state the units when documenting weight.
- ✔ Where a parent asks for a child's weight in imperial units, use conversion charts.

Spring clean



Wards in some hospitals are now using lockable bedside cabinets to store patients' medicines. Some incidents have occurred where the previous patient's medication have been discovered in the cabinet. This has been because the original patient has been discharged from hospital or transferred to another bed without checking the bedside cabinet for any of the patient's medicines.

Remember

- Empty and clean bedside cabinets after each patient is transferred or discharged, and
- Transfer or dispose of any remaining medicines found according to Trust policy.

And that's the end of that

Or is it? Medication incidents have been reported where the intention has been to discontinue a prescription but this has not been clearly indicated on the Kardex. This has resulted in administration continuing or in some cases a medicine being inadvertently restarted when the Kardex has been rewritten.

Always follow the directions on the Kardex for discontinuing medicines and ensure your intentions are clear.

For example, on the regional Kardex template prescriptions should be discontinued by:

- ✔ Drawing a diagonal line through the prescription section.
- ✔ Drawing a line through the remainder of the administration record.
- ✔ Entering a signature and date in the stop section of the prescription.

Calculations



- (1) How many nanograms in 1 microgram?
- (2) How many mg of calcium gluconate in 5ml of calcium gluconate 10% injection?
- (3) Clarithromycin IV 500mg has been prescribed in sodium chloride 0.9%. After reconstituting the powder with water for injection, it must be further diluted to a concentration of 2mg/ml? What volume of infusion fluid is required?
- (4) Clindamycin IV 900mg three times daily has been prescribed. It is available as 150mg/ml, 4ml ampoules. How many mls of clindamycin are required to prepare the infusion?

Answers at the bottom of the page

If you have any comments on this newsletter, please contact Angela Carrington, Medicines Governance pharmacist on Ext: 5724 at Royal Hospitals or by e-mail at angela.carrington@belfasttrust.hscni.net
Further copies of this and previous newsletters can be viewed at www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/index/pas/pas-governance.htm or on your Trust intranet.

What's in the bag?



Accurate dispensing of prescriptions involves many steps. One of the last steps includes packing the medicines into a patient labelled bag. Incidents have occurred where one or more items from one patient's prescription have been packed into a different patient's bag, putting the safety of both patients at risk.

Safety tips

- ✔ Use trays or dividers to keep all prescriptions for the same patient separated from other prescriptions on the dispensing bench.
- ✔ After completing the final check of individual items on the prescription, when 'bagging up' always make sure that you check off each dispensed item against the prescription as it is put into the patient's bag.

It's a real bind



Phosphate binders are medicines used in Chronic Kidney Disease to bind dietary phosphate in the gastrointestinal tract thus preventing absorption into the blood stream. It is therefore essential that these medicines are taken with meals. However on many occasions they are prescribed to coincide with medication administration rounds, which may not always be at main mealtimes.

Current phosphate binders and instructions for administration are as follows:

Phosphate binder	Administration instructions
Aluminium hydroxide capsules	Swallow whole with meals
Calcium acetate tablets	Swallow whole with meals
Calcium carbonate tablets	Chew just before meals
Lanthanum carbonate	Chew with or immediately after meals
Sevelamer	Swallow whole with meals

Safety tips

- ✔ As calcium carbonate may also be used as a calcium supplement, check the indication for use.
- ✔ For all phosphate binders, include administration instructions as part of the prescription on the Kardex.

Answers (1) 1000 (2) 500mg (3) 250ml (4) 6ml