Risk of confusion between non-lipid and lipid formulations of injectable amphotericin

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) is alerting all healthcare staff involved in the use of intravenous amphotericin of the potentially lethal results if non-lipid and lipid formulations of the drug are confused. These different formulations are used for the treatment of systemic fungal infections. The NPSA is aware of two recent deaths and a number of near misses reported to the National Reporting and Learning System (NRLS) and other similar incidents internationally. Further information on the issues raised in this Rapid Response Report, for example the evidence base and a comparison of formulations/doses is at www.npsa.nhs.uk/health/alerts

Intravenous amphotericin is available in four different formulations, non-lipid deoxycholate complex (Fungizone®) and as lipid formulations (Abelcet®, AmBisome®, and Amphocil®). The dosage recommendations for these preparations range from 1 – 5mg/kg. Confusion between the different formulations of amphotericin products can lead to:

- over or under dosing due to the different dose recommendations for each product;
- patients experiencing potentially lethal side effects or sub-therapeutic doses.

For IMMEDIATE ACTION by the NHS and the independent sector the deadline date for ACTION COMPLETE is 1 October 2007

1. The Chief pharmacists, pharmaceutical advisers and heads of pharmacy and medicines management in healthcare organisations should ensure that medical, nursing and pharmacy staff involved in the prescribing, preparation, supply and administration of amphotericin are aware of the potential risks

2. Undertake an immediate risk assessment of amphotericin products and procedures in accordance with NPSA’s Patient Safety Alert 20: Promoting safer use of injectable medicines, and take action to reduce the risks.

Further information about risks and actions which can be taken to reduce these risks and details of NPSA’s Patient Safety Alert 20 can be found at www.npsa.nhs.uk/health/alerts

The NPSA has informed:
All acute sector and Primary Care NHS organisations, the MHRA, Pharmaceutical Industry, Independent Healthcare Advisory Services, Royal Colleges, Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Guild of Healthcare Pharmacists, NHS Pharmaceutical Aseptic Services Group.

Further NPSA action
We will continue to monitor any incident reports involving intravenous amphotericin which are reported to the NRLS. For further information, contact Professor David Cousins on 020 7927 9356 or david.cousins@npsa.nhs.uk or email rrr@npsa.nhs.uk

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