



Patient Safety Alert

Stage One: Warning

Minimising risks of omitted and delayed medicines for patients receiving homecare services

10 April 2014

Alert reference number: NHS/PSA/W/2014/007

Alert stage: One - Warning

Medicine homecare services are commissioned by the NHS and are predominately provided by the commercial sector, delivering specialist medicines and medical devices, and nursing services needed to administer them, typically as packages of care. A wide range of treatments are provided including parenteral nutrition, chemotherapy, antibiotics, growth hormone and specialist treatments for HIV, cystic fibrosis and rheumatoid arthritis.

Medicine homecare services are largely commissioned by NHS Trusts. These services have expanded very rapidly in recent years and were the subject of a Department of Health report '*Homecare Medicines – Towards a Vision for the Future*' issued in November 2011. A major home healthcare service provider withdrew from the market late in 2013. This caused transitional issues as patients were transferred to new providers and has increased pressure on existing suppliers. The number of reports of failure to supply homecare medicines and products on time has increased significantly. This has in turn resulted in an increased risk to patients of medicine doses being omitted or delayed.

In response to these problems the homecare industry is taking action to improve services, and some providers have suspended accepting new high risk patients until necessary service improvements have been made.

Patient safety is a primary concern, and can be compromised when medicine doses are omitted or delayed. Healthcare organisations that commission homecare services (usually NHS trusts) have a responsibility to ensure the safety of patients who receive homecare services. This may include assessing the current capability of a selected medicine homecare service before new patients or new services are commenced. Also ensuring that existing homecare patients are aware of how and when to contact them in the event that supplies of medicine/products run low after an expected delivery has not occurred and they have been unable to contact the homecare provider. Procedures to ensure alternative methods of supply will be required to support these patients in these circumstances.

Such interim measures will need to be agreed with all relevant clinical staff and should include control measures to ensure patient safety is not further compromised by the provision of duplicate medicine supplies by multiple agencies. It is also important for NHS organisations to minimise requests to clinical homecare companies for duplicate information already in the NHS organisation. A register of patients on homecare may be available in hospital pharmacy departments from records of prescriptions issued to homecare providers.

Actions

Who: All healthcare organisations that commission clinical homecare services

When: As soon as possible but no later than 9 May 2014

-  Establish if medicine homecare services are used within your organisation and if incidents of omitted and delayed medicines have occurred.
-  Consider if immediate action needs to be taken locally and develop an action plan, if required, to reduce the risk and the potential risk to patients.
-  Disseminate this alert to all medical, nursing, pharmacy and other staff who are involved in the care of patients receiving medicine homecare services.
-  Report relevant patient safety incidents, including those reported to you by patients, to the [National Reporting and Learning System](#). Include in the report the term 'medicine homecare service' in the text description of the incident to aid analysis.
-  Share any learning from local investigations or locally developed good practice resources by emailing: patientsafety.enquiries@nhs.net.