

## PRACTICE NOTICE

### Good Dispensing Policy - Methotrexate

The Pharmacy Act 2007 emphasises the important role of both the supervising and superintendent pharmacists, and provides for an appropriate mechanism of management and accountability in the supply of health and pharmaceutical care, and medicinal products to patients.

One of the core functions in the delivery of pharmaceutical care and service is the safe supply of medicinal product to a patient in a systematic manner, which encompasses all good dispensing requirements. The patient is the primary focus of the dispensing process, and prescribed medicines must be assessed as appropriate for that individual, and delivered in a manner which reflects diligence and care in the receipt, review, assembling, checking, recording and dispatch of the product.

In the management of dispensing activity, the supervising and superintendent pharmacists must ensure that clear, structured management procedures and policies are in place, with adequate records maintained in respect of adherence to these requirements. These policies and procedures should include quality assured, safety checking systems for **before, during and after** the dispensing of prescribed medication. Ongoing evaluation of policies and procedures, with review and amendment if necessary, must be undertaken. As part of this review, consideration must be given to specific care issues in the dispensing of particular products, having due regard to the stock held and dispensing profile of a particular pharmacy. This notice suggests specific points in relation to the safe management of the dispensing of oral **methotrexate**.

- For each and every dispensing of methotrexate, the pharmacist must personally carry out a complete review of the patient's previous dispensed medication history, and any other relevant information e.g. use of the prescription-exempt medication, change in health status, last supply of methotrexate. Particular care must be taken when there is any change, in any medication used in conjunction with methotrexate to ensure that the patient, or patient's representative, clearly understands the adjustments.
- The labelling must be clear and legible, using type face which is of an appropriate size to ensure that the directions are clear. "As Directed" is never a suitable term to use to instruct a patient as to how the medicine is to be taken.
- The label should specify the day of the week that the medication is to be taken.
- It is advisable that one strength only (2.5mg) of oral methotrexate be kept in stock for routine dispensing. This will reduce patient confusion and the risk of error in administering the drug, as many patients tend to understand their dose in terms of numbers of tablets rather than mg of drug.
- For patients with impaired manual dexterity, ensure that the medication is dispensed in an appropriate container that the patient can easily open, to prevent the transfer to another, possibly inadequately labelled container.
- The pharmacist must personally deliver the appropriately labelled medicinal product to the patient, and must verbally confirm the dosage requirements with the patient, reinforcing the labelled instruction in a clear manner. This understanding must be confirmed demonstrably by the patient.
- It is also important to ensure that patients who are also taking folic acid can distinguish between the two medications.
- An offer must be made to counsel the patient each and every time the patient receives methotrexate. This counselling must emphasise the importance of checking with a pharmacist or doctor if any signs of infection are present e.g sore throat, mouth ulceration.
- In addition, patients, pharmacists and other pharmacy staff need to be aware of the symptoms of oral methotrexate toxicity - these include breathlessness, dry persistent cough, vomiting or diarrhoea.
- Any patient presenting at a retail pharmacy business who is known to be taking methotrexate, or indicates that they are taking the drug, should be seen by the pharmacist, irrespective of the nature of the advice or information sought.