NHS
National Patient Safety Agency

Rapid Response Report 1

From reporting to learning 18 June 2007

Risk of confusion between cytarabine and liposomal cytarabine (Depocyte®)

Please circulate this advice to all relevant staff

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) is alerting staff involved in the preparation and administration of intrathecal cytarabine of the potential for confusion between two similar preparations of the drug. These drugs are both chemotherapy medicine products.

The two licensed preparations are cytarabine (standard form) and liposomal cytarabine (Depocyte®), the newer long-acting formulation.[1,2] Other preparations of cytarabine injection are available but are not licensed to be administered by the intrathecal route.

Possible confusion between the two licensed cytarabine products for administration by the intrathecal route can lead to:

- over or under dosing due to the dose frequency of the two licensed cytarabine products being different;
- induction of severe acute arachnoiditis due to the use of lyposomal cytarabine (Depocyte®) without concomitant administration of a steroid.

Action for the NHS and the independent sector to be completed by 18 July 2007

1. The Chief Pharmacist should ensure that medical, nursing and pharmacy staff involved in intrathecal chemotherapy are aware of the potential risk
2. Take local actions to minimise potential risk.

Further NPSA action

The NPSA has informed:
NHS cancer networks, British Oncology Pharmacy Association (BOPA), British Society for Haematology (BSH), the Royal College of Pathologists, Paediatric Oncology Pharmacists Group (POP), Children's Cancer and Leukaemia Group (CCLG) and the Pharmaceutical Aseptic Services Group.

We will continue to monitor any incident reports involving intrathecal cytarabine. An example of a recent incident involving cytarabine will be available on the NPSA website at www.npsa.nhs.uk
For further information or questions, email rrr@npsa.nhs.uk

[1] Cytarabine 20mg/ml (100mg in 5ml). Mayne Pharma.
[2] Liposomal cytarabine (Depocyte®) 10mg/ml (50mg in 5ml). Napp Pharmaceuticals.