



Practice sting 2021-20

Practice sting Substitution of fentanyl lozenges with sublingual tablets

For the treatment of breakthrough pain, various fentanyl preparations for oral cavity are available, for instance sublingual tablets (for under the tongue) and lozenges (for against the cheek). These representations cannot simply be substituted, as is apparent from the following notification.

Notification

A patient, who uses fentanyl lozenges with applicator for breakthrough pain, presents a prescription for 30 fentanyl lozenges 400 micrograms in the pharmacy. If necessary, the dose is 1 tablet in the case of breakthrough pain, with a maximum of 6 times a day. The pharmacy does not have fentanyl lozenges in stock, but does have fentanyl sublingual tablets 200 micrograms. To help the patient quickly, the pharmacy assistant delivers 60 fentanyl sublingual tablets 200 micrograms. The pharmacy assistant adjusts the dose to 2 tablets if necessary, with a maximum of 6 times a day.

When checking the medication monitoring signals, the pharmacist observes that the pharmacy assistant has switched the patient to a different fentanyl preparation. Because the pharmacist knows that this switch can cause problems, he calls the patient. The patient had already taken the first dose of 2 tablets and did not understand what happened. He saw two cars where one car was standing.

Analysis

The absorption of fentanyl from the different oral preparations differs from each other. Especially the type of preparation (lozenge or sublingual tablet) influences the absorption. The admission also depends on the way in which the patient uses the medicine. In particular, how long and where the patient keeps the medicine in his mouth. Does the patient hold the lozenge against the cheek as it should be done or does he suck on it like with a lollipop?

The dosage depends on the route of administration. With lozenges (Actiq® or Fentanyl CF® lozenge with applicator) a larger proportion of the dose is swallowed in comparison with sublingual tablets (Abstral® or Fentanyl sublingual tablet Sandoz®). Result is that the sublingual tablet has a stronger effect than the lozenge.

Because of these differences, a new dose titration is necessary when switching to a different fentanyl preparation. Also when switching from one lozenge to another lozenge or from one sublingual tablet to another sublingual tablet, the effect may be different.

Recommendations

To pharmacists:

- Discuss with the pharmacy team that the different fentanyl oral preparations are not interchangeable and that a new dose titration must be performed when switching to a different type of preparation.
- Discuss with the pharmacy team that pharmacy assistants may only substitute fentanyl oral preparations after consultation with a pharmacist.
- Consider stating in the Pharmacy Information System that fentanyl oral preparations should not be substituted with each other.

To pharmacy assistants:

- Never substitute fentanyl oral preparations without consulting a pharmacist.
- When first dispensing fentanyl oral preparations, pay attention to proper use.