



Practice sting 2022-04

Practice sting Import of medicines that cannot be delivered

The unavailability of a medicine is a well-known problem in the Netherlands. Many pharmacists try - in order to provide the best possible service to the patient - to import the medicine from abroad. However, this introduces risks.

Notifications

1: Nitrofurantoin capsules 50 mg are not available and are therefore imported by the pharmacy. Because the medicine cannot be put into the medicine roll, the pharmacy delivers the nitrofurantoin separate from the medicine roll. It goes wrong in three patients. Instead of nitrofurantoin, the patients receive fluoxetine, which the pharmacy also imports due to delivery problems.

2: Mebendazole tablets 100 mg have not been available in the Netherlands for a long time. The pharmacy therefore imports mebendazole from Germany and supplies this product to a patient as an over-the-counter medicine. The product information leaflet is in German. The patient does not receive any further information from the pharmacist's assistant. It is confusing for the patient that the package leaflet is in German. In addition, the indications, doses and dosing intervals mentioned in the package leaflet are different from those that are customary in the Netherlands.

Analysis

The above notifications show that there are disadvantages to importing medicines from abroad, such as:

- The printing on the box and the package leaflet is in a foreign language and the information in the package leaflet may be different.
- The imported medicine cannot be entered in the AIS (pharmacy information system). As a result, automated medication monitoring and exchange via the LSP (country switch point) is not possible. The medicine is also not scannable upon delivery. This does not apply to medicines for which the IGJ (healthcare inspectorate) has granted generic permission for import from abroad, due to a temporary medicine shortage. These medicines will have a ZI number (pharmacy medicine number) after the next update of the G-Standard (pharmacy record number system) and can be entered in the AIS after that date.
- Imported medicines can usually not be supplied in a medicine roll.
- Extensive administrative procedures when importing a medicinal product from abroad for which the IGJ has not issued generic import permission.

For these reasons, one should exercise restraint when importing medicines. Of course, this does not apply to regular parallel imports where the product has a ZI number and a Dutch package leaflet.

Recommendations

For the pharmacist

- In case of delivery problems, go through the following steps:
 - First switch to the same medicine from another supplier or use regular parallel import (pharmaceutical substitution).
 - If possible, propose an alternative medicine for the same indication to the prescriber (therapeutic substitution).
 - Import the medicine from abroad.
 - Check whether the medicine can be prepared in the pharmacy.

- When importing from abroad, be aware of:
 - The documentation. The package leaflet is in a foreign language. Provide the patient with a Dutch package leaflet or patient information.
 - The disappearance of automated checks in the pharmacy and at the prescriber. This applies if the medicine does not yet have a ZI number, including automated checks, or if these have not yet been processed in the computer systems.
 - Incomplete transfer of medication data to other healthcare providers.