



Practice sting 2024-08

Practice sting Unclear labelling leads to incidents

This practice sting is particularly interesting for pharmacists

It is important that the medicine packaging and the text on the packaging are not open to multiple interpretations, as shown in the notification below.

Notification

A patient undergoes a four-week course of chemotherapy at home. She must take 40 mg dexamethasone once a week. She received a box with two bottles of tablets from the pharmacy. There is a label on the box that states on which days she should take two tablets. There is a sticker on the lid of the bottles that states DEXA 20mg, 4 tablets. There are no further instructions on the bottles. The patient assumed that one bottle - just like a bag from a medicine roll - was meant for one donation. So she did not take 40 mg but 80 mg of dexamethasone last week. The patient says that she is unsure whether she has taken the dexamethasone correctly, because she only received two bottles from the pharmacy.

Analysis

Dexamethasone tablets 20 mg are available in a jar of 30 pieces and as Unit Delivery Packaging (UDP) of 50 tablets. The UDPs are only supplied to hospital and institution pharmacies. Public pharmacies cannot order UDPs from wholesalers.

The outpatient pharmacy supplies measured numbers of dexamethasone 20 mg tablets per treatment. Because dexamethasone tablets fall into Dutch RiFaS hazard class 4, the tablets must be filled in a vacuum cupboard with respiratory protection. That is why the pharmacy fills a number of jars of 30 at the same time into bottles with one, two or four tablets. The filler puts a sticker on the lid of the bottle with 'DEXA' and the number of tablets.

The patient receives a course of chemotherapy in which she must take 40 mg dexamethasone weekly for four weeks. In total, she needs eight dexamethasone 20 mg tablets per treatment. The pharmacy assistant who prepares the prescription for this patient takes two bottles with four dexamethasone tablets and places them in an outer box on which she sticks a label stating '2 tablets per week, with the correct intake dates'. The pharmacy assistant forgets - against the pharmacy's rules - to put labels stating the use on the bottles. Furthermore, she does not realize that for patients who are familiar with the medication roll, it can be confusing that you only have to swallow half the content of a bottle at a time.

Recommendations

For pharmacists

- Ensure labelling that cannot be interpreted in multiple ways. Label the primary packaging (bottle) and the secondary packaging (outer carton) so that it is clear what the use is and what is in the bottle or outer carton respectively.
- Deliver the number of tablets per administration moment or treatment in a bottle. Avoid that a patient has to take part of the content of the bottle or the contents of multiple bottles per administration moment.
- In addition to clear written instructions, also give verbal instructions to the patient. Check whether the message was received correctly.