

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) has released a Patient Safety Alert detailing the hazards of wrong-route administration and recommending immediate actions to ensure that oral/enteral medications cannot be administered through an intravenous connection.

Hospitals can comply with the Patient Safety Alert immediately by using Baxa's Exacta-Med oral/enteral dispensers.

According to the Alert, inadvertent IV administration of oral medications resulted in numerous patient safety incidents and three reported deaths (2001 to 2004). The NPSA further proposes actions to minimise the risk of wrong-route errors - advocating the use of oral/enteral syringes for administering oral liquids that feature clear differentiation from those used for intravenous medication.

The Alert requires the use of oral/enteral syringes in all clinical areas by 30 September 2007, recommending the use of coloured oral/enteral syringes with clear labelling to help with differentiation. In addition, the syringe tips must be incompatible with any

Complies with NPSA Alert



intravenous or other parenteral devices. The NPSA's action points further indicate the removal of luer connections in tuberset ports, eliminating any potential confusion between central lines and feeding lines. The Alert also suggests that procedures, training and risk assessments be carried out to ensure all staff are aware of the potential for inadvertent error in administering liquid medication and are familiar with the procedures and products required to minimise risk.

The Baxa oral/enteral dispensers are syringe-like devices specifically designed for safe administration of oral and enteral liquids, as they cannot be used as intravenous syringes. These dispensers are clearly labelled and highly

differentiated, featuring a purple plunger - the colour most likely to become the European industry standard for enteral catheters and administration devices. Exacta-Med Dispensers also have a clear barrel for additional safety. Products with coloured or opaque barrels make it harder for nurses to detect air bubbles, may obscure particles within the liquid and can make accurate measurement more difficult.

The cost of changing to oral/enteral syringes is documented within the NPSA's Alert. Oral/enteral syringes tend to cost more than intravenous syringes, yet the report acknowledges that they can be washed and re-used for single patient use and to do so would provide significant economies. Baxa's managing director, Terry Aston, says: "Baxa Oral/Enteral Dispensers are validated for re-use up to 30 times on the same patient, so on a cost-per-use basis; this already makes them cost-effective as well as bringing additional benefits of safety."

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