

Medication Alert

DILTIAZEM!

ALERT 3 December 2005

- For the attention of :** PHO Clinical Leaders, Pharmacist Facilitators
For action by : General Practitioners, Practice Nurses, Community Pharmacists
For information to : DHB Quality and Risk Managers, DHB General Managers Funding.

Purpose of this alert

To highlight the different formulations of diltiazem that are available and the fact that they are not interchangeable.

Background to this Safe Use of Medicines alert

Diltiazem is a commonly prescribed medicine for hypertension, angina pectoris and rate control in atrial fibrillation. Different formulations of diltiazem have different durations of action and are not interchangeable. Admission and discharge information and prescriptions are not consistently specific about the brand, formulation or strength of diltiazem the patient has been prescribed.

Additional Information

- In the past, MedTech 32 listed the sustained release (SR) preparations of diltiazem as long acting (LA) and this created problems when prescribing generically. This problem may also exist in other prescribing systems
- General practitioners who prescribe from personal prescribing lists or who have patients who were prescribed diltiazem during the period when this problem existed are likely to have incorrect records

Definition

Diltiazem is produced by two manufacturers in six strengths and using different formulations. The different formulations are not interchangeable and therefore the formulation and brand name must be specified when prescribing this medicine. The separate A4 sheet attached illustrates the brands, strengths and release characteristics of diltiazem preparations currently available in New Zealand.

Recommended action

For all GPs using MedTech 32 and other prescribing systems:

- General practitioners should review patient medication records on the patient's next visit if:
 - They prescribe from a personal prescribing list
 - Have patients prescribed diltiazem prior to August 2004

- If a patient is taking a once daily preparation twice daily or vice versa then the patients' treatment should be reviewed and their progress monitored if any changes are made
- It would be better to re-prescribe the diltiazem in the correct brand, strength, formulation and dose rather than use previous prescriptions

For all GP's

- Ensure that the brand, formulation, strength and dose of diltiazem is specified on medication lists when referring patients to hospital (a similar alert has been issued to hospitals asking them to ensure that discharge summaries specify diltiazem brand, formulation, strength and dose)
- Ensure that the brand, formulation, strength and dose of diltiazem is specified on all prescriptions

For Community Pharmacists

- Pharmacists should ensure that prescriptions for diltiazem specify the brand, formulation, strength of diltiazem to be dispensed and check with the prescriber if there is any confusion or concern about the formulation in and/or dosage
- If a prescriber has been contacted about changing a prescription community pharmacists should ask the prescriber to update their prescribing record so that future prescriptions are correct
- Pharmacists should note that Cardizem CD® 120mg capsules are not the same as Dilzem SR® 120mg capsules and one can not be substituted for the other

Additional information about the different formulations of diltiazem

The sustained release, controlled delivery and long acting tablets and capsules should be swallowed whole. The Dilzem SR® capsules can be opened and the contents taken without destroying the release characteristics as long as the beads are swallowed whole and not chewed or dissolved.

For further action by the Safety and Quality of Medicines Group

The Safety and Quality of Medicines group will work with PHARMAC to investigate whether fewer brands of diltiazem should be funded to reduce the confusion and risk surrounding the prescribing, dispensing and administration of diltiazem.

If you require any further information or wish to provide feedback on this alert, please go to www.safeuseofmedicines.co.nz