quality safe use of medicines

Medication Alert

DILTIAZEM!

ALERT 3 December 2005

For the attention of :	Chief Executives of District Health Boards, Managers of Private Hospitals
For action by :	Pharmacy Managers, Charge Nurses, Clinical Directors
For information to :	DHB Quality and Risk Managers, Directors of Nursing

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.

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 sheet attached illustrates the brands, strengths and release characteristics of diltiazem preparations currently available in New Zealand.

Recommended action

DHB policies and procedures should cover the following points:

1. In-hospital diltiazem usage:

   Prescribing:

   - Ensure clinical staff are aware of the different formulations that are available by developing pamphlets/posters /education campaigns clearly showing the different formulations and their duration of action.
   - Ensure the formulation, brand name and strength of diltiazem prescribed are clearly stated on all prescriptions

- The formulation, brand name and strength should be included on discharge summaries to ensure continuity in diltiazem dosage
- When changing dose/formulation of diltiazem for a patient consider the timing of the next dose in relation to their original prescription

Administration

- If medicine is withheld for any reason, medical staff should be informed.
- Ensure oral medicine is not routinely withheld when patient is nil by mouth before theatre or procedure
- Nursing staff should be made aware of the different formulations of diltiazem available to ensure the incorrect formulation is not administered inadvertently. Plain or fast acting diltiazem tablets should NOT be administered in the place of controlled release, long acting or sustained release capsules or tablets when these are unavailable on the ward
- Where the dose of diltiazem prescribed is greater than 60mg the formulation and brand should be confirmed prior to administration
- The sustained release, controlled delivery and long acting tablets and capsules should not be crushed as this will adversely affect the release profile.

Dispensing and storage

Consideration should be given to only supplying slow release preparations and 30mg immediate release (not 60mg) diltiazem to wards to reduce the risk of inadvertent use of the immediate release preparation in place of a long acting, sustained or controlled release preparation.

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