

Quality and Safety Bulletin Number 35

SAFE PRESCRIBING AND SUPPLY OF VITAMIN D3 (COLECALCIFEROL)

A consultant dictated a letter to the GP and intended to request the GP to prescribe vitamin D3 50,000 units every 7 days for 6 weeks. However a typographical error that was not identified before sending, resulted in the clinic letter requesting the GP to prescribe 50,000 units every day for 6 weeks.

The GP prescribed the vitamin D3 50,000 units every day for 6 weeks and the community pharmacy supplied the medication. Although the clinic letter and vitamin D3 guidelines stated that a blood test needed to be completed after the 6 week course this was not done and a 2nd 6 week course was prescribed and supplied. The patient took up to 10 weeks worth of Vitamin D3 50,000 units every day before being admitted into hospital.

This resulted in the patient experiencing vitamin D toxicity and hypercalcaemia, which was identified when the patient was admitted to hospital.

The error was initially made by the hospital consultant however the GP and the community pharmacy both missed opportunities to make an intervention to prevent the patient receiving high dose vitamin D3 inappropriately.

Why is it important?

Hypercalcaemia can cause a range of serious symptoms for the patient such as; abdominal pain, kidney disorder leading to excessive thirst and urination, digestive problems such as nausea, vomiting, stomach ache and constipation, weakening of bones, muscle pain, weakness, anxiety and depression, confusion, loss of concentration and fatigue and in severe cases, renal failure, coma and heart problems like cardiac arrhythmia.

What You Can Do?

- Always ensure the accuracy of correspondence sent and received.
- Check medication and doses are accurate by referencing the BNF and SPC.
- Sometimes when treatment doses fall outside of BNF and SPC guidance this is purposeful. Please ensure in these circumstances that appropriate rationalisation is provided in the clinic letter or local guidelines available via <https://www.hey.nhs.uk/herpc/prescribing-guidelines/> or NICE guidelines available at: <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance>.
- If appropriate rationalisation for the requested medication can't be found please contact the prescriber/sender of the clinic letter for clarification.
- Clinical Guideline for testing and replacement of Vitamin D available from <https://www.hey.nhs.uk/wp/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/vitaminD.pdf>
- Be accountable for your practice and professional responsibility.

If you would like more information please send queries to
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