

Dear colleague

**Re National Patient Safety Agency Patient Safety Alert:  
Preventing fatalities from medication loading doses**

The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) issued a patient safety alert that was sent to you at the end of November 2010 regarding loading doses. The vast majority of drugs are only relevant to secondary care but a few will be prescribed in primary care. The need for both loading and maintenance doses creates complexity in prescribing, dispensing and administering medication, and this complexity can increase the likelihood of human error.

**Actions from the patient safety alert for primary care are:**

- Clinical checks are performed by medical, nursing and pharmacy staff so that loading and maintenance doses are correct. Appropriate information should be available to support these checks.
- Healthcare professionals in the community know when to challenge abnormal doses of the identified critical medicines.

We have been working with the acute Trusts to ensure appropriate handling of all medications with loading doses. We can confirm:

- All the acute Trusts within Devon will give patients the complete loading dose course of oral medicines on discharge or in the out-patient clinics, for example oral loading of amiodarone. GPs will then take over prescribing once the patient is on the maintenance dose. The only exceptions are:
  - Steroid reducing courses where the reduction to a maintenance dose occurs over many weeks. The hospital clinician will specify full information on dosing in the discharge letter or clinic letter.
  - Loading of warfarin where doses will have to be altered following INR results. Information on doses given and INR results will be communicated to practices as part of the discharge documentation.
  - The slow loading of warfarin for AF
- Drugs under shared care guidelines will continue to be prescribed as per the shared care guidance.

The chart attached shows the normal doses of key drugs that would be seen in the community. Doses higher than this should be discussed with the prescriber.

**Background**

A loading dose is a large dose of medicine used to ensure a quick therapeutic response. It is usually administered for a short period before therapy continues on a lower maintenance dose. Depending on the medication type, a single loading dose or a series of loading doses over several days may be required. The maintenance dose is then administered over the medium to long term to maintain effective levels of medication in the body tissues and fluids.

The full rapid response can be found at

<http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/?entryid45=92305&q=0%acloading+doses%ac>

Yours sincerely,



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