

Patient Safety: Prescribing of 'Higher' Strength Buprenorphine Transdermal Patches

Summary

When prescribing 'higher' strength buprenorphine patches (i.e. 35, 52.5 or 70 micrograms/hour) to ensure that patients receive an appropriate product with directions detailing the correct frequency of application, it is recommended that:

- Prescribing is done by brand name [Bupeaze®](#), and
- Prescribed directions should be clear: [Bupeaze®](#) should be replaced after 96 hours (4 days) at the latest. For convenience of use, the transdermal patch can be changed twice a week at regular intervals, e.g. always on Monday **morning** and Thursday **evening**.

This information relates to higher strength buprenorphine patches only, 'lower' strength patches (i.e. 5, 10, 15 and 20 micrograms) should be prescribed generically.

Rationale

- The [Specialist Pharmacist Service](#) lists buprenorphine patches as a medication which they recommended to be prescribed by brand name to “*reduce the risk of confusion and error in dispensing and administration*” and the [Scottish Palliative Care Guidelines](#) recommend that “*patients should ideally stay on the same formulation and should not switch between patches*”.
- Various brands of 'higher' strength buprenorphine patches are available.
- All brands of 'higher' strength buprenorphine patches have the same licensed indication: “*Moderate to severe cancer pain and severe pain which does not respond to non-opioid analgesics. Not suitable for the treatment of acute pain*”.
- Some brands directions for use indicate patches should be replaced every 3 days, while others indicate changing every 4 days.
- Bupeaze® has been selected as the NHS Grampian preferred brand of 'higher' strength buprenorphine patch, as they represent the best value for money when compared with other brands.
- Bupeaze® patches should be replaced after 96 hours (4 days) at the latest. For convenience of use, the transdermal patch can be changed twice a week at regular intervals, e.g. always on Monday morning and Thursday evening – the [Patient Information Leaflet](#) has useful information regarding days of changing.

Actions Required

Primary Care

- All patients prescribed 'higher' strength buprenorphine patches should be prescribed by brand Bupeaze[®] with directions as detailed above.
- Patients currently prescribed 'higher' strength buprenorphine patches either generically or as a brand other than Bupeaze[®] should be switched to Bupeaze[®] prescribing (unless there is clinically significant reason to not switch which should be documented in the patients notes).
- Any patients discharged from secondary care on a brand of 'higher' strength buprenorphine patch other than Bupeaze[®] should have prescribing changed in line with this recommendation.
- Ensure all patients being prescribed buprenorphine patches are counselled on directions for use, ensuring the frequency for changing patches is highlighted to the patient.
- Where changes to prescribing are being made practices should liaise with their local community pharmacies to coordinate this change and minimise stock wastage.

Secondary Care

Where a patient is being discharged from secondary care and there is a need for ongoing prescribing of a 'higher' strength buprenorphine patch this should be recommended either generically or as the NHS Grampian preferred brand (Bupeaze[®]).

Community Pharmacy

Where patients are prescribed buprenorphine patches ensure they are counselled on the directions for use, ensuring the frequency for changing patches is highlighted to the patient.

NHS Grampian Preferred Brand

It should be noted that the NHS Grampian preferred brand of buprenorphine patch is subject to change, owing to product availability and procurement costs.

Formulary and ScriptSwitch

To support these recommendations Grampian Area Formulary information and ScriptSwitch messaging will be updated to reflect changes.

Any queries relating to this information should be directed to the NHS Grampian Medicines Management team at gram.medicinesmanagement@nhs.scot