

Medicines Matters

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GLP-1 RECEPTOR AGONISTS UPDATE: REMINDER OF THE POTENTIAL SIDE EFFECTS AND TO BE AWARE OF THE POTENTIAL FOR MISUSE

On the 24th October 2024 the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) issued guidance highlighting the potential side effects linked to the prescribing of GLP-1 receptor agonists (GLP-1 RA's). This guidance can be found at the following link [GLP-1 receptor agonists: reminder of the potential side effects and to be aware of the potential for misuse - GOV.UK](#).

Data from the yellow card scheme for reporting adverse events to the MHRA shows that up to 31st January 2025 there were 22 deaths from adverse reactions associated with use of GLP-1 RA's for weight loss and 60 deaths linked to use for treating type 2 diabetes. **Given the data there are potential safety concerns emerging for this class of drug.**

Advice for Prescribers

- Inform patients when **initiating treatment** or **increasing the dose of a GLP-1 RA's** about the common risk of gastrointestinal side effects which may affect more than 1 in 10 patients. Although usually non-serious, these can sometimes lead to more serious complications such as severe dehydration, resulting in hospitalisation.
- Be aware that hypoglycaemia can occur in non-diabetic patients using some GLP-1 RAs for weight management.
- Be aware there have been reports of potential misuse of GLP-1 RAs for unauthorised indications such as aesthetic weight loss.

Advice for healthcare professionals to provide to patients and carers

- Common gastrointestinal side-effects of GLP-1 RAs treatment (including nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and constipation) can persist for several days.
- Stay well hydrated, throughout treatment, by drinking plenty of fluids (such as water) to avoid dehydration. Severe dehydration may lead to other serious health complications such as kidney damage resulting in hospitalisation
- Ensure patients are aware of the symptoms and signs of hypoglycaemia and know to urgently seek medical advice should they occur.
- Other serious but less common side-effects of GLP-1 RAs include acute gallstone disease, pancreatitis, and serious allergic reactions.
- GLP-1 RAs are prescription-only medicines to be used under medical supervision and should only be prescribed by a registered healthcare professional.
- The benefits and risks of using a GLP-1 RAs for weight loss outside of the licensed indications have not been studied.

Risk of falsified supplies of GLP-1 RAs

Prescribers are reminded that falsified, potentially harmful Ozempic and Saxenda products containing insulin have been found in the UK. Further information can be found at the following link [Ozempic▼\(semaglutide\) and Saxenda \(liraglutide\): vigilance required due to potentially harmful falsified products - GOV.UK](#)

Healthcare professionals are asked

- To remain vigilant for symptoms linked to hypoglycaemia in patients who may have obtained a falsified product containing insulin. Report suspected adverse drug reactions through the yellow card scheme at the following link [Yellow Card](#).

To remind patients

- If obtaining a private prescription (from a non-NHS prescriber), ensure that this is dispensed from authorised sources, such as registered online pharmacies, to avoid the risk of receiving falsified pens.
- Carefully read the instructions for use in the Patient Information Leaflet, and use the prescribed dose.
- If you are concerned about any side-effects, speak to a healthcare professional
- Do not take GLP1 RA's that are prescribed for someone else.

To contact the Medicines Optimisation Team for Central Lancashire please call 01772 287877