

Prescribing tip for information

## Fentanyl transdermal patches in opioid-naive patients

[MHRA Drug Safety Update \(Sept 2020\)](#)

### **Fentanyl transdermal patches should not be started in opioid-naïve patients for non-cancer pain**

**This is now reflected in the Patient Information leaflet (PIL):**

#### **Warnings and precautions**

- Matrifen can have life-threatening side effects in people who are not already regularly using prescribed opioid medicines.

#### **Rationale<sup>1</sup>:**

- Serious harm and fatalities have been reported in patients treated with fentanyl patches
- Respiratory depression has been reported in opioid naïve and opioid experienced patients treated with fentanyl (MHRA Yellow card reporting)
- There is also significant risk with too rapid an escalation of dose, even in long-term opioid users
- **12 microgram/hour fentanyl patch equates to daily doses of oral morphine of up to 45mg a day<sup>1</sup>**

#### **Alternatives to fentanyl:**

- If pharmacological analgesia is indicated, then other analgesics (including other opioid analgesics) should be used for non-cancer pain before the use of fentanyl
- It is unusual for any analgesic, including strong analgesics like opioids, to completely eliminate chronic pain. The focus of treatment should be on reducing a person's pain with a view to improving their quality of life<sup>2</sup>
- New NICE [chronic pain guidance](#) states that opioid analgesics should **not** be initiated to manage primary chronic pain<sup>3</sup>
- Consider social prescribing options, exercise, acupuncture, and psychological therapies (ACT/CBT)<sup>3</sup>

#### **Other relevant warnings:**

[MHRA/CHM advice: Benzodiazepines and opioids: reminder of risk of potentially fatal respiratory depression \(March 2020\)](#)

[MHRA/CHM advice: Opioids: risk of dependence and addiction \(September 2020\)](#)

[MHRA/CHM advice: Transdermal fentanyl patches: life-threatening and fatal opioid toxicity from accidental exposure, particularly in children \(October 2018\)](#)

#### **References:**

<sup>1</sup> MHRA Drug Safety Alert. <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/transdermal-fentanyl-patches-for-non-cancer-pain-do-not-use-in-opioid-naive-patients>. September 2020

<sup>2</sup> NICE. <https://www.nice.org.uk/advice/ktt21/chapter/Key-points>. September 2019

<sup>3</sup> NICE Chronic pain (primary and secondary) in over 16s: assessment of all chronic pain and management of chronic primary pain. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng193>. April 2021

**To contact the Medicines Optimisation Team please phone 01772 214302**