

Prescribing tip for information

Herbal and homeopathic medicines – reporting suspected adverse reactions and interactions.

Herbal and homeopathic remedies are often considered to be ‘naturally occurring’ or prepared in such low doses that the potential risk of harm is insignificant when taken either alone or in combination with conventional medication. Monitoring of [yellow card reporting](#) has however highlighted many important safety issues (eg St John’s wort and [hormonal contraceptives](#) and [antiepileptics](#)) and reinforces the ongoing need to **monitor the safety of all medicines** in the UK including herbal and homeopathic medicines.

Annual medication reviews provide an ideal opportunity to take a **full drug history** which should include details of prescribed, over the counter, internet purchased items and all herbal/complementary products & supplements. The review may raise questions about the suitability to continue taking such preparations on a long-term basis.

The UK Medicines Information service (UKMI) recommend [a standardised approach](#) when dealing with queries relating to the risk of interactions between herbal and homeopathic remedies (often referred to as CAM (complementary and alternative medicines)) and conventional medicines.

- **What details does the patient have about the product?** - manufacturer, brand name, product website, supplier and formulation.
- **Did someone recommend the product?** - If yes who? Is the person qualified to make such recommendations?
- **Have they purchased the product?** – If purchased from the internet it may be useful to signpost them to NHS advice on the [dangers of buying medicines online](#)
- **Have they started taking the product?** - If yes how long for and have they experienced any problems?
- **What is contained in each product they wish to take?** – useful in case there are multiple products with the same brand name but different ingredients.
- **Is the CAM a homeopathic remedy?** UKMI provides a useful [document](#) to consult when considering potential adverse effects and drug interactions with homeopathic remedies.
- **Does the CAM comply with quality standards for safety and manufacturing?** - Choosing a product that is licensed means that it meets the required standards of quality, safety and patient information. Details on the ways to check if product has been licensed by MHRA can be found [here](#).

Certain [groups of patients, conventional medicines and CAMs](#) are deemed to be particularly ‘high risk’ and patients should be discouraged from taking CAM due to an **increased theoretical risk of adverse outcome**. If a patient is suspected of experiencing an adverse drug reaction to herbal or homeopathic remedies the following information should be included in any yellow card report.

- brand name (if it has one)
- the list of ingredients
- details of the manufacturer / supplier / licensed status
- the condition it was being used for
- any other medicines taken in the previous 3 months
- if the product was supplied by a herbal or homeopathic practitioner - their name and address
- a photo of package labelling (emailed to yellowcard@mhra.gov.uk)
- If you do not have all of the above information please still complete a yellow card.

For further support and advice regarding adverse reactions / interactions between CAM and conventional medication please contact UKMI at nwmedinfo@nhs.net.

Other useful resources

- Online tutorial for healthcare professionals who regularly answer queries about interactions between CAM and conventional medicines [Alternative medicine: Questions to ask | Medicines Learning Portal](#)
- [Banned and restricted herbal ingredients - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Updates on the Clinical Evidenced Herb-Warfarin Interactions \(nih.gov\)](#)

To contact the Medicines Optimisation Team please phone 01772 214302

If you have any suggestions for future topics to cover in our prescribing tips please contact Nicola.schaffel@nhs.net