Drug News
藥 物 情 報

Issue No. 30 : April 2012

This is a monthly digest of local and overseas drug safety news and information released by the Drug Office of the Department of Health in the month as stated above. For the latest news and information, please refer to public announcements or the website of the Drug Office of the Department of Health (http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk).

Safety Update

Batch recall of Alimta (pemetrexed) Powder for Concentrate for Solution for Infusion 500mg

On 5 April 2012, Department of Health (DH) had been informed by Eli Lilly Asia, Inc. (Eli Lilly) on an immediate voluntary worldwide recall of three batches of Alimta 500mg (A921858, A929456 and A931727). The recall was initiated because another batch of the product manufactured in the Eli Lilly and Company facility in Fegersheim, France was found to fail a sterility test. Subsequent investigation identified the likely source of the contamination was a leak at a flange joint gasket on the Finnaqua 2 Freeze Dryer which served as a point of ingress of non-sterile air and moisture. Three potentially implicated batches were then being recalled.

In Hong Kong, Alimta Powder for Concentrate for Solution for Infusion 500mg (HK-53331) and 100mg (HK-58016) are registered by Eli Lilly and are prescription medicines indicated for cancer therapy. According to the company, the three batches being recalled had not been imported into Hong Kong and no product complaints or related adverse health events associated with the above batches had been reported to the company. DH will keep vigilant against any updated safety news of the drug.

Canada: Addition of new risk statements on the product labels of Benzocaine

Following a safety alert about the risk of methemoglobinemia (MetHb) associated with topical benzocaine in April last year, Health Canada informed Canadians on 5 April 2012 that new risk statements would be added to the packaging and labelling of all benzocaine products except lozenges which did not show a positive risk of MetHb. The new risk statements included safety precautions to reduce the risk of MetHb (e.g. recommendation of using the smallest dose, guidance on recognizing the signs and symptoms of MetHb) and the precautions when using on children.

In Hong Kong, apart from lozenges, there are 8 registered pharmaceutical products containing the local anaesthetic benzocaine. Similar safety alert related to topical benzocaine products has been issued by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) of US in April 2011, which was also reported in Issue No. 18 of Drug News. The matter was discussed at the meeting of the Pharmacy and Poisons (Registration of Pharmaceutical Products and Substances: Certificate of Clinical Trial/ Medicine Test) Committee (the Registration Committee) of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board on 11 May 2011. The Committee decided that the package inserts and/or labels of products containing benzocaine for topical oral use should indicate that they should not be used for children under 2 years of age and a statement on the associated risk of MetHb should also be included. As the current news released by the Health Canada was for all benzocaine products except lozenges, the matter will be further discussed in the meeting of the Registration Committee. A letter to healthcare professionals was issued on 10 April 2012.

US: Updated information about the risk of blood clots in women taking birth control pills containing drospirenone

As reported in Issues No. 20 and 24 of Drug News, FDA initiated a safety review of venous thromboembolism (VTE) with the combined oral contraceptive (COC) containing drospirenone in

June 2011 following the release of 2 newly published studies. On 10 April 2012, FDA announced that the Agency had completed the safety review and concluded that drospirenone-containing birth control pills might be associated with a higher risk for blood clots than other progestin-containing pills. The review included some epidemiologic studies which reported a three-fold increase in the risk of blood clots for drospirenone-containing products when compared to products containing levonorgestrel or some other progestins and some other epidemiological studies which found no additional risk of blood clots with drospirenone-containing products. The information about these studies was being added to the labels of drospirenone-containing birth control pills. FDA opined that although the risk of blood clots was higher when using any birth control pill, it still remained lower than the risk associated with pregnancy and in the postpartum period. Healthcare professionals were advised to consider the risks and benefits of these products before prescribing them to patients. Women were advised to discuss with their healthcare professionals before using the birth control method.

In Hong Kong, two oral contraceptives containing drospirenone are registered, namely, Yasmin Tab (HK-48905) and Yaz Tab (HK-56563). Both are registered by Bayer Healthcare Ltd. As reported in previous Drug News, the issue was discussed at the meeting of the Registration Committee of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board on 15 June 2011. The Registration Committee decided that the sales pack label and/or package insert of products containing drospirenone that were used as COCs should include that their risk of VTE was higher than levonorgestrel-containing second generation COCs, and might be similar to desogestrel-containing or gestodene-containing third generation COCs. This was in accordance with the recommendations made by the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) of UK as stated in Issue No. 20 of Drug News. DH will keep vigilant against any updated safety information of the drug from other health regulatory authorities.

US: Changes in the label of finasteride to expand the list of sexual adverse events

On 11 April 2012, FDA announced the changes in the labels of finasteride-containing products, Propecia (finasteride 1 mg) and Proscar (finasteride 5 mg) to include a list of sexual adverse events reported to FDA as some of them had been reported to continue after the drug was stopped. The events were libido disorders, ejaculation disorders, and orgasm disorders for Propecia, and decreased libido for Proscar. In addition, a description of reports of male infertility and/or poor semen quality that normalized or improved after drug discontinuation were also added to the labels of both products. Although the causal relationship between finasteride and sexual adverse events was not clear, the Agency considered this piece of information might be important for the prescribers and patients when choosing the best treatment options.

In Hong Kong, there are around 21 finasteride-containing products (including Propecia and Proscar) registered and are prescription medicines. They are indicated for the treatment of men with male pattern hair loss (Propecia) and the treatment of symptomatic benign prostatic hyperplasia (Proscar). In view of FDA's action, a letter to healthcare professionals was issued on 13 April 2012. The matter will be discussed in the meeting of the Registration Committee of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board.

Canada, China: Potential association between Actos (pioglitazone hydrochloride) and bladder cancer

Subsequent to the safety reviews of Actos (pioglitazone hydrochloride) as reported in Issues No. 12, 20 and 21 of Drug News, Health Canada made an announcement on 16 April 2012 about the result of the safety assessment of Actos and the updated product monograph of Actos to reflect its potential risk of bladder cancer. The revised product monograph included description of the potential assoication between bladder cancer and pioglitazone -containing products, new contraindications (in patients with active bladder cancer, a history of bladder cancer or uninvestigated macroscopic haematuria) and special precautionary measures (any macroscopic haematuria should be investigated and risk factors for bladder cancer should be assessed before initiating treatment with pioglitazone). Healthcare professionals were advised to educate their patients to be vigilant about the symptoms of bladder cancer.

On 24 April 2012, the State Food and Drug Administration (SFDA) of China had also released a

notification on the revised product information of pioglitazone in relation to the risk of bladder cancer.

In Hong Kong, there are around 24 pioglitazone-containing products (including Actos) registered and are prescription medicines. Pioglitazone is an antidiabetic medicine used to manage Type II diabetes mellitus primarily by decreasing insulin resistance. Letters to healthcare professionals were issued on 16 June 2011 and 22 July 2011. The matter was discussed in the Registration Committee of Pharmacy and Poisons Board on 6 September 2011. Upon the Committee's decision, the labels of local products have been updated to provide similar warning in the sales pack and/or package insert of the products.

US: Potential life-threatening harm from accidental exposure to Fentanyl Transdermal Systems

On 18 April 2012, FDA reminded the public and healthcare professionals about the appropriate storage, use and disposal of fentanyl patches so as to prevent potential life-threatening harm from accidental exposure. The announcement was made after the Agency had reviewed a series of 26 pediatric cases reported to have accidental exposures to fentanyl patches over the past 15 years. Among them, ten resulted in death and 12 required hospitalization. Besides, 16 cases involved children aged two years old or younger. Young children were considered at risks of accidental exposures because of their mobility and curiosity. The exposure could lead to serious and even fatal adverse events in children because of the amount of fentanyl in the patches exposed. Accidental exposure could also occur with used patches as they could still contain a considerable amount of fentanyl. Healthcare professionals were urged to educate their patients and caregivers about the proper use and disposal of fentanyl patches.

In Hong Kong, there are 6 fentanyl-containing patches registered and are prescription medicines. They are opioid analgesics indicated for the management of chronic and intractable pain. In view of the FDA's alert, a letter to healthcare professionals was issued on 20 April 2012. DH will keep vigilant against any updated safety news of the drug.

EU: New advice on managing the risk of cardiovascular adverse effects with Gilenya (fingolimod)

On 20 April 2012, the European Medicines Agency (EMA) provided healthcare professionals new advice to reduce the risk of cardiovascular adverse effects with the use of Gilenya (fingolimod). Following a review on its safety, the Agency's Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) recommended that doctors should not prescribe Gilenya to patients with a history of cardiovascular disease, cerebrovascular disease or taking medications that lowered the heart rate. However, when Gilenya treatment was considered necessary in these patients, advice from a cardiologist should be sought. The Committee also recommended that close cardiac monitoring should be initiated in patients before receiving the first dose of Gilenya and for at least six hours thereafter. If patient's heart rate was found to be lowest six hours after receiving the first dose of Gilenya, the monitoring should be extended for at least two hours. If patient developed clinically significant heart problems such as bradycardia or atrioventricular (AV) block, the monitoring should continue at least overnight and until the problems had been resolved. In addition, the Committee advised a revision of the product information of Gilenya to strengthen the warnings and precautions on its cardiovascular effect. The CHMP concluded that the benefits of Gilenya continued to outweigh the risks if the above measures were in place.

In Hong Kong, Gilenya (fingolimod) (HK-61192) is registered by Novartis Pharmaceuticals (HK) Ltd. and is a prescription medicine indicated for multiple sclerosis. In view of the EMA's recommendations, a letter to healthcare professionals was issued on 23 April 2012. The matter will be discussed in the meeting of the Registration Committee of the Pharmacy and Poisons Board.

UK: Batch recall of Sodium Bicarbonate 8.4% Intravenous Infusion, 100ml bottle

Further to Issue No. 29 of Drug News, MHRA announced on 20 April 2012 that B. Braun Medical Ltd. (B. Braun) recalled a second batch (batch number 111838021, expiry date on 30 April 2013) of its product, Sodium Bicarbonate 8.4% Intravenous Infusion 100ml bottle because B. Braun had received reports of precipitation whilst in use.

Safety Update

In Hong Kong, Sodium Bicarbonate Inj 8.4% (HK-28230) is registered by B. Braun Medical (HK) Ltd. It is an intravenous solution primarily indicated for metabolic acidosis and urine alkalisation. According to the company, the above batch had not been marketed in Hong Kong. As reported in Issue No. 29 of Drug News, another batch (batch number 111358021) which had been distributed in Hong Kong was found to be affected and recalled from market on 26 March 2012. A letter to healthcare professionals and press statement were issued on the same day.

Drug Recall

Recall of unregistered pharmaceutical product Lorista tablets 50mg (HK-59349)

On 30 April 2012, DH instructed Unipharm Trading Co. (Unipharm), a licensed wholesaler, to recall from market all batches of Lorista tablets 50mg (HK -59349) as the product may bear unapproved package insert and render it unregistered pharmaceutical product. The product contains losartan which is for the treatment of hypertension. It is a prescription medicine which can only be sold with doctor's prescription and under the supervision of pharmacist at registered pharmacies.

The matter came to light upon the DH's investigation into a public enquiry that the package insert was in a language not correspond to the registered version.

Unipharm imported 5,500 boxes and 2,209 of them were sold to private doctors and local pharmacies. DH had alerted professional healthcare bodies about the matter and closely monitored the recall. So far, DH had not received any adverse drug reaction reports. Press statement was released on the same day.

Under the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (Cap 138), possession or sale of unregistered pharmaceutical product is an offence liable to the maximum penalty of a $100,000 fine and two years' imprisonment.

Useful Contact

Drug Complaint:

Tel: 2572 2068

Fax: 2147 0457 & 2123 1996

E-mail: pharmgeneral@dh.gov.hk

Adverse Drug Reaction (ADR) Reporting:

Tel: 2319 2920

Fax: 2147 0457

E-mail: adr@dh.gov.hk

Link: http://www.drugoffice.gov.hk/adr.html

Post: ***Pharmacovigilance Unit,***
Drug Office, Department of Health,
3/F, Public Health Laboratory Centre,
382 Nam Cheong Street, Kowloon

The purpose of Drug News is to provide healthcare professionals with a summary of local and overseas drug safety news released. Healthcare professionals are advised to keep update with the information and provide corresponding advice or therapeutic measure to patients and public.