Drug Alert

Look Alike And Sound Alike (LASA) Drugs

Medication use is a complex process that comprises the sub-processes of medication prescribing, order processing, dispensing, administration, and therapeutic effects monitoring. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) has identified 10 key elements with the greatest influence on medication use including, drug labeling, packaging and nomenclature, noting that weaknesses in these can lead to medication errors.

Medications in which packaging is visually similar to another medication are called look-alikes. And, medications that have generic names which sounds similar in the spoken or written word comes in the category of sound-alikes. According to the United States Pharmacopeia (USP), more than 3100 pairs of drugs marketed in the United States have brand or generic names that are close enough that confusion between the agents has resulted in a medication error and tens of thousands of them are significant.

Errors due to look-alike/sound-alike (LASA) name confusion usually occur in the dispensing phase of the medication process (64%) involving pharmacy technicians or pharmacists. However, about 20% of the errors have been attributed to nurses and 7% to physicians. And, factors contributing include incomplete knowledge of drugs, illegible handwriting, misinterpretation of names, newly available products, the failure of manufacturers and regulatory authorities to recognize the potential for error and to conduct rigorous risk assessments.

These errors may be manageable since most medications have a large margin of safety. Nevertheless, a small number of drugs named “high-alert medications” (can be accessed at http://www.ismp.org/Tools/highAlertMedicationLists.asp) have a high risk of causing injury when they are misused. Errors may or may not be more common with these drugs than with the use of any others; however, the consequences of the errors are more devastating. For this reason, special considerations are required.

At present, the ISMP, USP and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) collect and track medication errors and make information available to health care providers and the public, making recommendations including the followings. And, Please, to archive on the common LASA drugs encountered, check on www.ismp.org.

Pharmacists
- Separating LASA drugs from one another
- Double checking the drug before dispensing
- Contacting the prescriber in case of any clarification regarding the prescription
- Becoming familiar with LASA drugs

Physicians
- Avoid verbal prescriptions to a maximum extent.
- Clearly write the prescriptions using TALL man letter whenever possible

Consumers
- After buying, they should ensure to see whether the drug in hand is the same as the one in the prescription.
- Consumers must be aware as to why that particular drug is prescribed and the appropriate usage of the medication.

Drug Information Center @Gishen Pharmacy
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References:
http://www.ismp.org/faq.asp
http://www.epicareonline.com/? p=1927
http://www.jointcommission.org/assets/1/18/SEA 19.pdf
http://www.medindia.net/patients/patientinfo/sala-drugs.htm

Disclaimer: This service is intended to provide a supplemental drug information resource to health care professionals and is not intended to be a replacement for appropriate medical or pharmaceutical care to patients.