

# Editorial

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Dear Readers,

We keep reading in literature about the serious problems patients are facing due to the improper use of high risk medicines.

High Risk Medicines are those that have a high risk of causing injury or harm if they are misused or any errors occur. Error rates with these medications are not necessarily higher than with any other medicines, but when problems occur, the consequences can be severe.

High risk medicines may vary between hospitals depending on the types of medicines used there and patients treated. However, evidence suggests a group of medicines which can universally be considered high risk.

These medicines include anti-infective agents, anti-psychotics (A), potassium and other electrolytes (P), insulin (I), narcotics (N) and sedative agents, chemotherapeutic agents (C), heparin (H) and other anticoagulants. The group of medicines is represented by the acronym - A PINCH.

High-risk medicines used within a hospital should be identified and appropriate plan should be in place to ensure that they are stored, prescribed, dispensed and administered safely.

**For example,** Potassium chloride is reported to be a high risk drug. Medication error with this has resulted in many fatal

incidences in the past. Therefore, it should be handled with utmost care, should not be available on routine drug counters and should be made available on demand from the pharmacy only.

Similarly, Vincristine, a medicine commonly used in the treatment of leukaemias and lymphomas, is neurotoxic and must only be administered intravenously. Vincristine can be fatal if administered by the intrathecal route.

Clozapine is an atypical antipsychotic used in the treatment of patients with schizophrenia. Despite there being clear benefits associated with clozapine, its use is very restricted because of significant safety concerns as it is associated with potentially fatal agranulocytosis, neutropenia, severe constipation, myocarditis and adverse metabolic effects.

High risk medicine alert system helps to warn health care professionals about serious known medication risks, outline the action required to minimize risks and provide tools to facilitate risk minimization.

We, Pharmacists have an important role in working with the clinicians to recognize and manage the risks associated with these medicines.

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