COMMISSION ON HUMAN MEDICINES
CHAIRMAN: SIR GORDON W. DUFF

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Oral tacrolimus products should be prescribed and dispensed by brand name to avoid the risk of medication errors

Dear Colleague,

I am writing to inform you of updated advice on oral tacrolimus products. These should be prescribed and dispensed by brand name to minimise the risk of inadvertent switching between products, which has been associated with previous reports of toxicity and graft rejection.

This action follows further review by the Commission on Human Medicines (CHM) on the safe use of oral tacrolimus products. The CHM review concluded that in light of the growing numbers of tacrolimus products, and to ensure maintenance of therapeutic response when a patient is stabilised on a particular brand, oral tacrolimus products should be prescribed and dispensed by brand name only. This supersedes previous advice regarding the prescribing and interchangeability of different tacrolimus products.

This updated recommendation does not preclude patients changing to a different tacrolimus brand if the prescriber considers this to be of benefit to the patient. However, any changes between brands should always be accompanied by careful therapeutic monitoring.

All tacrolimus products in the UK, including generics, are approved with a brand name.

Advice for healthcare professionals and patients

- Prescribers should prescribe oral tacrolimus products by brand name only. When prescriptions have previously been written using the generic name, the brand on which the patient is stabilised should be established to ensure that the patient is supplied with the same product.
- If a prescriber intends to switch between any tacrolimus brands, careful medical supervision and therapeutic monitoring are required.

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- Pharmacists should always dispense the exact brand prescribed. They should contact the prescriber if the prescription is not clear to ensure the appropriate medicine is dispensed.
- Patients should be advised to take careful note of the name of their usual tacrolimus brand and should check with their doctor or pharmacist if they receive a different brand or if they have any other questions about the prescription, e.g. about the dose.

Background

Tacrolimus is a drug with a narrow therapeutic index, and even minor differences in blood levels have the potential to cause transplant rejection or adverse reactions.

The three different pharmaceutical forms of oral tacrolimus products are shown below, together with brand names of currently approved products.

- Immediate release capsule taken twice a day (including the following brands - Adoport, Aletris, Capexion, Evenil, Miloprosan, Prograf, Tacni, Takon, Taliximun, Tamitect and Vivadex)
- Prolonged release capsule taken once daily (Advagraf)
- Granules for oral solution taken twice daily (Modigraf).

In 2008 there were reports of unintended switching of pharmaceutical forms that led both to toxicity and to graft rejection reactions. This prompted the publication in 2009 of the advice on the requirement for close supervision when changing tacrolimus products and the need for great care when prescribing and dispensing oral tacrolimus. Following the introduction of the first generic oral immediate release tacrolimus products, and to minimise the risk of medication errors, further advice was issued in May 2010. This advice stressed the need to provide the full information (pharmaceutical form, strength, dose and dose frequency) in the prescription of tacrolimus, or the alternative of prescribing by brand name.

The CHM has now completed a further review on the safe use of tacrolimus products. The CHM considered that the risk of medication errors between the different oral pharmaceutical forms may increase as more tacrolimus products are approved in the UK. Therefore, as a precautionary measure, the CHM has updated its advice on the safe use of oral tacrolimus products and recommends

that to avoid confusion for patients and prescribers, and to avoid inadvertent switching of product from different suppliers, all oral tacrolimus products should be prescribed by brand name only.
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This recommendation does not imply that a patient's treatment cannot be changed to a different tacrolimus pharmaceutical form or brand if the prescriber considers this appropriate. However, any changes between brands (which may or may not involve changes in dosing regimen) should be accompanied by careful therapeutic monitoring under the supervision of an appropriate specialist.

This advice will remain in place until any further advice by CHM is issued.

Please report suspected adverse reactions to any medicine or vaccine through the Yellow Card Scheme (www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard).

Further information is available at www.mhra.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully,