



Tablet Press

The prescribing newsletter for GPs, nurses and pharmacists in
Northamptonshire Primary Care Trust



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- **Report provides new warnings about varenicline side effects in the United States**

A report published by the non-profit Institute for Safe Medication Practices (ISMP) in the United States has found that varenicline has been linked to more than 3,000 reports of adverse events including attempted and completed suicide. The report analysed adverse effects associated with varenicline that have been reported to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It was noted that these included 227 reports of suicidal acts, thoughts or behaviours, 397 cases of possible psychosis and 525 reports of hostility or aggression. These figures also included 28 cases of suicide and 41 references to homicidal ideation, 60 cases of paranoia and 55 cases of hallucination.

The ISMP report says: We have immediate safety concerns about the use of varenicline among persons operating aircraft, trains, buses and other vehicles, or in other settings where a lapse in alertness or motor control could lead to massive, serious injury. The report goes on to recommend: Based on reports of sudden loss of consciousness, seizures, muscle spasms, vision disturbances, hallucinations, paranoia and psychosis, we believe varenicline may not be safe to use in these settings. In addition, we recommend that patients and doctors exercise caution in the use of varenicline and consider the use of alternative approaches to smoking cessation.

PharmaTimes reports that following publication of the ISMP report, the USA's Federal Aviation Administration has now banned the use of varenicline by pilots.

A copy of the report is available from the Pharmacy and Prescribing Team – unfortunately no web link available.

- **MHRA warning re Exenatide**

The latest MHRA Drug Safety Bulletin has featured an article on the risk of acute pancreatitis associated with exenatide. The Bulletin makes the following recommendations for healthcare professionals (taken directly from source):

Patients should be informed of the characteristic symptom of acute pancreatitis: persistent, severe abdominal pain; back pain may also be present

If pancreatitis is suspected, exenatide and other potentially suspect medicines should be discontinued

[Drug Safety Update: Volume 1, Issue 10, May 2008](#)

- **Cold sore machine on NHS prescription**

This machine has recently been advertised in the media. The Virulite CS device is a handheld battery-operated device (PP3; 9V), with a clear treatment window that is held against the skin surface at the site of the cold-sore infection. The device emits pulsed 1072-nm narrowband light from two light-emitting diodes, and has an internal microprocessor that ensures consistent light intensity and duration, with a timer and automatic treatment cut-off after a 3-min treatment cycle. The end of treatment is denoted by an audible signal. The Drug Tariff price is £18.50.

There seems to be a very limited evidence base (two published trials with a total of 92 patients), and no long term safety data; the PCT does therefore not recommend it.

- **No such thing as a free lunch**

A recent "view and reviews" article in the BMJ, advocating Pharmaceutical industry sponsored lunches as a good source of information about new drugs has provoked a large number of rapid responses – worth reading!

<http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/336/7650/962-a>

This edition is also available on HNN (Health Network Northants)

<http://www.northants.nhs.uk/Display/Dynamic.jsp?topid=14070&lhsid=514&oid=2854¤tid=2854>

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