



October 2012

To Registered Managers:

Nursing Homes
Residential Care Homes
Children's Homes
Domiciliary Care Agencies
Independent Health Care

A Coroner's report on a patient death in England in 2011 told of a 67 year old woman who died after taking a hot bath while wearing two fentanyl transdermal patches. The woman had applied a new patch but not taken the old one off.

Further to this incident, The Royal Pharmaceutical Society issued a reminder in December 2011 about the need to advise patients about avoiding heat sources e.g. heat lamps, prolonged hot baths, which could increase absorption while using fentanyl patches. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in the United States and the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) in the United Kingdom have issued previous warnings about the safe use of fentanyl patches following reports of deaths.

In the last year, RQIA have received incident reports which have identified that staff did not remove the 'old' patch from the patient before applying a 'new' one. In one instance a patient had several patches left on and as a result was admitted to hospital.

Please ensure that all relevant staff are informed of the following information in relation to the use of these patches.

Fentanyl is a potent opioid analgesic:

Fentanyl '12' patch is equivalent to up to 40mg of oral morphine daily
Fentanyl '25' patch is equivalent to up to 90mg of oral morphine daily
Fentanyl '50' patch is equivalent to up to 180mg of oral morphine daily
Fentanyl '75' patch is equivalent to up to 270mg of oral morphine daily
Fentanyl '100' patch is equivalent to up to 360mg of oral morphine daily

Examples of heat sources to avoid:

Hot water bottles
Heat or tanning lamps
Electric blankets
Hot spa baths
Prolonged hot baths
Heating pads

Directions for safe use:

Follow the prescribed dose and correct frequency of administration
Ensure old patches are removed before applying a new one
Do not cut patches
Avoid touching the adhesive side and wash hands after application
Follow instructions for safe storage and disposal
Read the patient information leaflet carefully

Signs of fentanyl overdose:

Trouble breathing or shallow breathing;
Tiredness;
Extreme sleepiness or sedation;
Inability to think, walk or talk normally;
Feeling faint, dizzy or confused.

Patients or caregivers should be advised to seek medical attention immediately if overdose is suspected.

Patches should be removed immediately and the patient monitored for up to 24 hours after patch removal.

If you require any further advice please contact one of the pharmacist inspectors at either the Belfast or Omagh office.



Muriel Dickson

Director of Regulation and Nursing (Acting)