Prescribing and dispensing clozapine in the community
Issue 27, June 2015

Target audience: General practitioners, pharmacists, mental health services.

Purpose

To inform practitioners of the administrative requirements when prescribing and dispensing clozapine to Queensland patients on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) after 1 July 2015.

Background

The Federal Government has announced changes to the PBS which will commence on 1 July 2015 and allow community-based prescribers, under the supervision of a hospital psychiatrist, to prescribe clozapine for maintenance therapy only in the treatment of schizophrenia. Community pharmacies will be able to dispense these prescriptions and claim a PBS subsidy. Existing state and territory authorisations for shared care arrangements are to apply to these community access arrangements.

In Queensland, clozapine is classed as a regulated restricted drug under the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulation 1996. Specialist health practitioners in the specialty of psychiatry and registrars in psychiatry working directly under the supervision of a specialist health practitioner in the specialty of psychiatry have as of right authority to prescribe clozapine. Other prescribers may only prescribe clozapine for human therapeutic use under an approval.

Shared care arrangements currently exist in Queensland, where a general practitioner works in collaboration with their local mental health service to provide care for the clozapine patient in a community setting. As part of this arrangement, the general practitioner receives training from the clozapine coordinator and becomes responsible for some elements of the patient's clozapine-related care, usually ordering the monthly blood tests, in addition to managing their primary care needs.

There are two brands of clozapine available in Australia, Clozaril from Novartis and Clopine from Hospira. Brand substitution is not allowed, as each brand comes with its own monitoring service (Clozapine Patient Monitoring System [CPMS] for Clozaril or Clopine Connect for Clopine).

Issues

Prescribers

Community-based prescribers wishing to prescribe clozapine to patients for maintenance therapy only under the new PBS rules must be in a shared care arrangement with their local mental health service. They must undergo training from the clozapine coordinator related to the monitoring and prescribing requirements for clozapine. They must also be registered with the appropriate clozapine monitoring service.
Community-based prescribers must apply for an approval from the Chief Executive of Queensland Health before being eligible to prescribe clozapine to patients in Queensland. The application form can be accessed through the following link:


As part of their application, the community-based prescriber must provide the details of the psychiatrist who is providing the necessary supervision to enable them to prescribe clozapine, and the details of the clozapine coordinator participating in their shared care arrangement. They must also list details of the clozapine monitoring service they are registered with as a qualification relevant to the approval.

Pharmacists

Pharmacists may only dispense prescriptions for clozapine written by an approved prescriber. The prescription must be endorsed with the word 'Approved' by the prescriber.

Pharmacists do not require an approval from the Chief Executive of Queensland Health to dispense clozapine, provided the prescription is written by an approved prescriber; however they must be registered with the clozapine monitoring service applicable to the brand of clozapine they wish to dispense.

Pharmacists cannot substitute brands when dispensing clozapine. The two clozapine monitoring services are brand-specific, and the patient must be managed on one or the other, not both.

Pharmacists should be aware of who the clozapine coordinator is for each patient, in addition to the patient's general practitioner.

Recommendations

General practitioners wishing to prescribe clozapine when the PBS changes come into effect on 1 July 2015 should apply for an approval prior to prescribing.

For more information please contact:

Medicines Regulation and Quality

Phone: 07 3708 5264
Fax: 07 3708 5431
Email: MRQ@health.qld.gov.au