

Manufacturer Breathes New Life Into Delivery Of Insulin

Exubera, a rapid-acting, powdered form of insulin that can be inhaled, has been approved for treating Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes. The product is the first new insulin delivery system since insulin was discovered in the 1920s.

Patients use a handheld device to inhale Exubera through their mouth and into the lungs. Patients with Type 1 diabetes can use Exubera in addition to longer-acting injected insulin, while those with Type 2 dia-

betes can use Exubera by itself or in combination with longer-acting injected insulin or other oral diabetes medications.

Side effects of Exubera include low blood sugar, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, and dry mouth. Patients who smoke or recently quit smoking shouldn't use Exubera, nor should those with asthma, bronchitis, or emphysema. Patients need to undergo a lung function test before starting treatment with Exubera and should repeat the test once or twice each year.

U.S. Food & Drug Administration. "FDA approves first ever inhaled insulin combination product for treatment of diabetes." 2006. www.fda.gov/bbs/topics/news/2006/NEW01304.html (30 Jan. 2006).

Error Watch

Drug Name Confusion Often Leads To HIV Med Errors

Confusion over drug names is a common cause of errors with antiretroviral medications, according to the December 2005 issue of the "CAPSLink" newsletter, which is published by the U.S. Pharmacopeia (USP).

From January 2000 through December 2003, 400 medication errors involving antiretroviral drugs were reported to the USP's MEDMARX program. Confusion over drug names accounted for almost a fifth of these errors. In one case, the pharmacy dispensed 400 mg of the HIV drug didanosine instead of 400 mg of the calcium regulator Didronel. The patient received the HIV drug for four days. In another case, a physician ordered 100 units of vitamin E, but the HIV drug Viramune was dispensed. The error was not caught until the pharmacy went to refill the prescription.

The USP suggests that when writing HIV medication orders or prescriptions, clinicians include the drug's generic name, brand name, and drug class, and avoid using abbreviations. The USP also says that reference resources and medication charts that include pictures of these drugs "should be available to all healthcare professionals, especially in dispensing areas in pharmacies and in medication preparation areas on nursing units."

This Antibiotic Is Linked To Severe Liver Injury

The FDA has received three reports of patients who developed serious liver damage after taking telithromycin (Ketek), a ketolide antibiotic approved in 2004 for treating acute bacterial infections.

All three patients presented with jaundice and markedly abnormal liver function tests within a few days of receiving telithromycin. One patient recovered on his own, one recovered after undergoing a liver transplant, and the third died. None had a history of liver dysfunction.

The FDA advises clinicians to carefully monitor patients who are taking telithromycin for signs and symptoms of liver problems such as jaundice or blurry vision, and to discontinue the drug if a patient develops liver-related symptoms.

Clay, K. D., Hanson, J. S., et al. "Brief communication: Severe hepatotoxicity of telithromycin: Three case reports and literature review." *Ann Intern Med.* 2006. www.annals.org/cgi/content/full/0000605-200503210-00121v1 (21 Feb. 2006).

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