17 October 2014

Reducing harm from high-risk medicines

Medication errors and adverse drug reactions (ADRs) are the main cause of adverse drug events (ADEs) in New Zealand’s health system.

A campaign has begun to prevent and reduce ADEs, up to 60 per cent of which are thought to be preventable.

Chief of Allied Health Professions Sue Waters says Auckland DHB will be doing its part in driving the campaign.

“The harm done to individual patients is the major concern, but so too is the annual cost of preventable ADEs in New Zealand. This could be as much as $158 million. And clearly, that’s money not being well spent.”

“Three-quarters of New Zealanders are estimated to have had a prescription for one or more medicines in the year ended 30 June 2013. While most medicines have a large margin of safety, a small number can potentially cause significant harm even when used as intended. The medicines most frequently involved in serious ADEs are called high-risk medicines. Special attention is needed when they are prescribed, dispensed, supplied, stored, administered and taken,” Ms Waters says.

Errors are not necessarily more common with high-risk medicines. But if errors are made with these there is more likely to be harm and often the consequence for patients is more serious.

In New Zealand, between July 2007 and June 2013 there were 2159 reported serious adverse advents, of which 132 were medicine-related. Twenty-three related to opioids, 19 to anticoagulants and seven to insulin. This is only the tip of the iceberg, as not all medicine-related events are recognised or reported.

The campaign is for patients, clinicians and other staff in primary, community and secondary care. It seeks to raise awareness about high-risk medicines and promote ways to reduce error and harm in the use of them.

The Health Quality & Safety Commission’s is running it for six months from Thursday 16 October 2014 until the end of March 2015. For more follow the link to the HQ&SC’s campaign pages.

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For further information, please contact the Auckland DHB Media Line – 09 375 3499