

Antiepileptic drugs briefing – Appropriate switching and safety considerations

Antiepileptic drug (AED) switches should be undertaken using shared decision making with patients and within current guidance on switching AEDs¹⁻³ to negate any potential harms to, or concerns from, patients.

Key recommendations

- Secondary care specialists should provide advice in the 'action for GP' section of the discharge summary or outpatient letter to the GP whether a generic AED preparation is suitable for the patient or whether a particular generic manufacturer or brand is necessary.
- When considering switching AEDs used to treat **epilepsy** consider the following:
 - » Advice from the specialist on whether a particular brand or generic manufacturers product should be prescribed.
 - » Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) advice on switching between different manufacturers' products for the three categories of AEDs.
 - » United Kingdom Clinical Pharmacy Association (UKCPA) and the Pharmaceutical Market Support Group (PMSG) principles for switching and consensus advice on points to consider when switching.
- Prescribe a branded AED for use in epilepsy where no generic alternative is available.
- Patients receiving AEDs in categories 2 and 3 for epilepsy should be considered for switching where there are no contraindications or concerns following clinical judgement and including patient/carer factors, seizure frequency and treatment history.
- Consider a switch to generic AEDs for all AEDs prescribed for **non-epilepsy** indications, e.g. pregabalin/gabapentin for neuropathic pain as the MHRA guidance is not applicable to non-epilepsy indications. This should be discussed with the patient in advance.
- Any switch to a generic AED should be fully discussed with the patient to gain their agreement with the switch, reduce the risks of non-adherence and anxiety caused by the switch. Blanket AED switches without individual patient consideration are not recommended.
- Provide suitable patient information, for example the [MHRA patient letter Antiepileptic drugs: changing between different manufacturers' products](#), to help patients with any concerns.
- Community pharmacies should be fully informed in order to gain their support for the switch process and to help alleviate potential patient concerns.
- Consider initiating a generic AED following recent loss of seizure control where extra (adjunctive therapy) or a new AED will be prescribed (even those where a switch is not recommended).
- Before considering any brand to generic switches for valproate, first ensure that the new national patient safety advice has been followed for male and female patients under the age of 55 years.
- Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), Health Boards ((HBs) in Scotland and Wales), and Health and Social Care Trusts (in Northern Ireland) should ensure that responses to the valproate National Patient Safety Alert have been completed.
- Prescribers should familiarise themselves with, and follow the new regulations, and provide patients with information about the risk of taking valproate medicines during pregnancy. As a precaution, male patients on valproate who are planning a family in the next year should talk to their healthcare professional about their treatment.

Cost and savings

Approximately £376 million is spent annually on all antiepileptic drugs (AEDs) in England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Isle of Man (NHSBSA Oct-Dec 2023 and Public Health Scotland Aug-Oct 2023). Approximately £21 million annually could be saved by appropriately switching selected AEDs.

References

1. MHRA. Antiepileptic drugs: new advice on switching between different manufacturers' products for a particular drug. Drug Safety Update 2013; 7(4): A1. <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/antiepileptic-drugs-new-advice-on-switching-between-different-manufacturers-products-for-a-particular-drug>
2. United Kingdom Clinical Pharmacists Association (UKCPA): Neurosciences Group & Pharmaceutical Market Support Group (PMSG): Generics Sub-Group. Consensus View. The use of generic anti-epileptic drugs in patients with epilepsy. September 2020. <https://www.sps.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Generic-Antiepileptic-Drugs-in-Epilepsy-Update-Sept-2020.docx>
3. MHRA. Antiepileptic drugs: updated advice on switching between different manufacturers' products. Drug Safety Update 2017; 11(4): 5. <https://www.gov.uk/drug-safety-update/antiepileptic-drugs-updated-advice-on-switching-between-different-manufacturers-products>

Additional resources available	Bulletin	https://www.prescqipp.info/our-resources/bulletins/bulletin-348-antiepileptic-drugs/
	Tools	
	Data pack	https://data.prescqipp.info/views/B348_Antiepilepticdrugs-appropriateswitchingtogenericsorbrandequivalents/FrontPage?%3Aembed=y&%3Aiid=1&%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y

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