

cytotoxic medicines have a narrow therapeutic index and monitoring the patient for safety and efficacy is essential. Written and verbal communication with patients and carers is critical for the safe and appropriate use of cytotoxic therapy.

If a patient unknown to the prescriber, pharmacist or healthcare professional presents for oral cytotoxic therapy, the risk of continuing therapy should be balanced against the risk of stopping therapy until

a full history and safety checks are done. In many cases delaying therapy for a short time while a full patient review is conducted and laboratory counts are obtained is safer than continuing therapy. <

*Dr Carrington served on advisory boards for Amgen and Merck Sharp & Dohme and has received honoraria from Roche and Merck Sharp & Dohme for educational presentations.*

## REFERENCES

1. The Institute for Safe Medication Practices. Lowdown on lomustine: we'd hate CeeNU make this mistake. ISMP Safety Alert; 2004 Jul 15. [www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20040715.asp](http://www.ismp.org/Newsletters/acutecare/articles/20040715.asp) [cited 2013 Jan 7]
2. Holquist C, Phillips J. FDA Safety Page: fatal medication errors associated with Temodar. Drug Topics 2003;7:42. <http://drugtopics.modernmedicine.com/drugtopics/DrugInformation/ArticleStandard/article/detail/110864> [cited 2013 Jan 7]
3. NHS National Patient Safety Agency UK. Rapid Response Report: risks of incorrect dosing of oral anti-cancer medicines. 2008 Jan 22:NPSA/2008/RRR001. [www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/?entryid45=59880](http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/?entryid45=59880) [cited 2013 Jan 7]
4. Weingart SN, Spencer J, Buia S, Duncombe D, Singh P, Gadkari M, et al. Medication safety of five oral chemotherapies: a proactive risk assessment. J Oncol Pract 2011;7:2-6.
5. Arnet I, Bernhardt V, Hersberger KE. Methotrexate intoxication: the Pharmaceutical Care process reveals a critical error. J Clin Pharm Ther 2012;37:242-4.
6. Department of Health Victoria. Quality use of medicines notice: Caution with oral chemotherapy for cancer. 2010. [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Oral-for-health-services-Victorian-Department-of-Health.pdf](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Oral-for-health-services-Victorian-Department-of-Health.pdf) [cited 2013 Jan 8]
7. Carrington C, Stone L, Koczwara B, Searle C, Siderov J, Stevenson B, et al. The Clinical Oncological Society of Australia (COSA) guidelines for the safe prescribing, dispensing and administration of cancer chemotherapy. Asia Pac J Clin Oncol 2010;6:220-37.
8. Australian Rheumatology Association. Patient Information. 2012. [www.rheumatology.org.au/community/PatientMedicineInformation.asp](http://www.rheumatology.org.au/community/PatientMedicineInformation.asp) [cited 2013 Jan 7]
9. NHS National Patient Safety Agency UK. Improving compliance with oral methotrexate guidelines. 2006. NPSA/2006/13. [www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/healthcare-setting/community-hospital/?entryid45=59800&cord=ASC](http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/healthcare-setting/community-hospital/?entryid45=59800&cord=ASC) [cited 2013 Jan 7]
10. Carrington C, Gilbar P, Wintraeken J; The Society of Hospital Pharmacists of Australia Committee of Specialty Practice in Cancer Services. Standards of practice for the provision of pharmaceutical care of patients receiving oral chemotherapy for the treatment of cancer. J Pharm Pract Res 2007;37:149-52.
11. Goodin S. Oral chemotherapeutic agents: understanding mechanisms of action and drug interactions. Am J Health Syst Pharm 2007;64 Suppl 5:S15-24.
12. Viele CS. Managing oral chemotherapy: the healthcare practitioner's role. Am J Health Syst Pharm 2007;64 Suppl 5:S25-32.
13. Cancer Institute NSW. EviQ Cancer Treatments Online [website]. [www.eviq.org.au](http://www.eviq.org.au) [cited 2013 Jan 7]
14. Grunberg SM, Osoba D, Hesketh PJ, Gralla RJ, Borjeson S, Rapoport BL, et al. Evaluation of new antiemetic agents and definition of antineoplastic agent emetogenicity—an update. Support Care Cancer 2005;13:80-4.
15. Roila F, Herrstedt J, Gralla RJ, Tonato M. Prevention of chemotherapy- and radiotherapy-induced nausea and vomiting: guideline update and results of the Perugia consensus conference. Support Care Cancer 2011;19 Suppl 1:S63-5.
16. Basch E, Prestrud AA, Hesketh PJ, Kris MG, Feyer PC, Somerfield MR, et al. Antiemetics: American Society of Clinical Oncology clinical practice guideline update. J Clin Oncol 2011;29:4189-98.

## FURTHER READING

Risks associated with prescribing oral methotrexate [media release]. NPS MedicineWise. 2011 Dec 20.

[www.nps.org.au/media-centre/media-releases/repository/health-professionals-alert-to-the-risks-associated-with-oral-methotrexate](http://www.nps.org.au/media-centre/media-releases/repository/health-professionals-alert-to-the-risks-associated-with-oral-methotrexate) [cited 2013 Jan 7]

## Dental note

### Safe use of oral cytotoxic drugs

**Michael McCullough**  
Chair  
Therapeutics Committee  
Australian Dental  
Association

The increasing use of oral cytotoxic drugs for non-oncological diseases has resulted in an increased likelihood that dental patients will be taking them. The oral mucosa has a very high cell turnover rate and these drugs will invariably result in thinning of the mucosa, and often, concurrent salivary hypofunction.

These patients are likely to require increased care and, if they have complex dental treatment needs, may require specialist management. Good communication with the treating doctors and appropriate referral where necessary will significantly help these patients.