

POLICY FOR THE PRESCRIBING AND SUPPLY OF WARFARIN TABLETS

Background

Warfarin is the oral anticoagulant of choice in the United Kingdom.¹ Warfarin therapy requires strict monitoring of the International Normalised Ratio (INR) to ensure it is in the therapeutic range. The most common and dangerous adverse effect of warfarin is haemorrhage. This is more likely to occur when the INR is excessively high.

Warfarin tablets are available in four strengths. Each strength is colour coded as listed in Table 1 below:

Strength	Colour coding
0.5mg	White
1mg	Brown
3mg	Blue
5mg	Pink

Table 1. Warfarin tablet strengths and colour coding

The availability of four strengths of warfarin has caused confusion and led to medication incidents.^{2,3} **There is particular concern about the potential for confusion between warfarin 0.5mg and warfarin 5mg tablets, with a resulting tenfold over- or underdose.**

These serious incidents have resulted in a request for a national standard for supply of warfarin tablets to reduce such incidents, but this has yet to be established.²

Prescribing and supply of warfarin tablets.

To minimise the possibility of a warfarin medication incident:

- **Doctors must prescribe warfarin 1mg and 3mg tablets only.** Warfarin 5mg and warfarin 0.5mg tablets must be avoided.
- Where clinically possible, warfarin should be prescribed as a whole number, e.g. either 1mg or 2mg, not 1.5mg.
- **The pharmacy department will stock 1mg and 3mg tablets only.**

If you have any further questions, please phone the pharmacy department on extension .

References:

1. British National Formulary, No 43, March 2002.
2. The Practitioner 1994; 238:792.
3. Pharmacy in Practice 1997; 11:570.