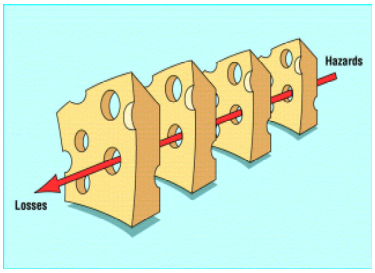

Northern Ireland Medicines Governance Team

SAFETY MEMO 12

To: Directors of Pharmaceutical Services / Trust Pharmacy Managers
Directors of Pharmaceutical Services, HSSBs for cascade to Community Pharmacists

Cc: Dr N Morrow, Chief Pharmaceutical Officer, DHSSPS
Professor David Cousins, Head of Safe Medication Practice, NPSA

From: Medicines Governance Team

Date: 17th July 2007

RE: Dispensing of potassium chloride MR (Slow K®) and sodium chloride MR (Slow Sodium®)

Medication incidents have been reported involving confusion between two different preparations, Slow K® and Slow Sodium®, where the wrong preparation has been dispensed.

The two preparations have similar proprietary names and are packaged in identical white plastic tubs. The preparations are labelled with differently coloured labels and the tablets themselves have different coloured coating. In practice, only one product is likely to be selected for dispensing at any one time, therefore the difference in colour may not be evident unless both products are well known to the individual dispensing the medicine.

The manufacturers of both products have been requested to review the packaging and this has also been highlighted to the National Patient Safety Agency.

Until such time as any changes to packaging are made, we recommend the following action to minimise the risk of confusion between these two medicines:

- Confirm if these medicines are stocked in Pharmacy.
- Ensure adequate separation between the two products, for example storing the medicines under their generic name rather than their proprietary name separates the two products.
- Attach shelf edge alert notices to both storage locations within pharmacy – overleaf.
- In hospitals, review current stock holding by wards and departments to determine if any areas routinely stock both medicines. Where it is deemed appropriate for both products to be stocked, attach shelf edge notices in the storage location.
- Continue to promote prescribing, ordering and dispensing using the generic name of both medicines in accordance with DHSSPS 'Go generic' initiative.

- Consider rationalisation of the oral potassium supplements in use. BNF states that MR oral potassium preparation should be avoided unless effervescent tablets or liquid preparations are inappropriate.

Many pharmacies may be aware of, and have dealt with, this issue. However it is advised that pharmacies review their arrangements for the safe selection of these medicines.

Shelf edge alert notices

One alert notice is provided for each shelf location

**** CAUTION – Risk of confusion ****

Slow K® and Slow Sodium®
***Identical white tubs**

Remember – always read the label.

**** CAUTION – Risk of confusion ****

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Remember – always read the label.