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## Concomitant use of benzodiazepines/benzodiazepine like products and opioids

Advice from CMDh

### Introduction

In [August 2016 the FDA](#) decided to add warnings to the drug labelling of prescription opioids (indicated for pain or cough) and benzodiazepines. It concerns the serious risks of respiratory depression, coma and death, associated with the combined use of certain opioids and benzodiazepines. Separate wording has been proposed for opioids for pain, substitution therapy or cough and for benzodiazepines.

Following this, National Competent Authorities have received corresponding variations for National approved products in the EEA.

With the aim of having harmonised texts within the EEA, CMDh has agreed on a proposed text to be included for benzodiazepines and benzodiazepine like products (i.e. z-drugs), with regards to the warnings for concomitant use with opioids. A corresponding text for opioids is also agreed.

The proposed text is **guidance on key messages** that should be included, taking into account any necessary adaptation to the current product information of the individual product.

If the message is already covered in the product information, in a similar wording, there is no need to submit additional variations.

The proposed text for benzodiazepines and benzodiazepine like products is given below, followed by a corresponding text for opioids.

(The proposed text is not seen as applicable for products intended for an emergency setting.)

### Proposed text for benzodiazepines and related drugs

SmPC section 4.4: Special warnings and precaution for use

Risk from concomitant use of opioids:

Concomitant use of <product name> and opioids may result in sedation, respiratory depression, coma and death. Because of these risks, concomitant prescribing of sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs such as <Product name> with opioids should be reserved for patients

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for whom alternative treatment options are not possible. If a decision is made to prescribe <Product name> concomitantly with opioids, the lowest effective dose should be used, and the duration of treatment should be as short as possible (see also general dose recommendation in section 4.2).

The patients should be followed closely for signs and symptoms of respiratory depression and sedation. In this respect, it is strongly recommended to inform patients and their caregivers (where applicable) to be aware of these symptoms (see section 4.5).

SmPC section 4.5: Interaction with other medicinal products

Opioids:

The concomitant use of sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs such as <Product name> with opioids increases the risk of sedation, respiratory depression, coma and death because of additive CNS depressant effect. The dosage and duration of concomitant use should be limited (see section 4.4).

PL (section 2), Other medicines and <Product name>:

Concomitant use of <Product name> and opioids (strong pain killers, medicines for substitution therapy and some cough medicines) increases the risk of drowsiness, difficulties in breathing (respiratory depression), coma and may be life-threatening. Because of this, concomitant use should only be considered when other treatment options are not possible.

However if your doctor does prescribe <Product name> together with opioids the dose and duration of concomitant treatment should be limited by your doctor.

Please tell your doctor about all opioid medicines you are taking, and follow your doctor's dose recommendation closely. It could be helpful to inform friends or relatives to be aware of the signs and symptoms stated above. Contact your doctor when experiencing such symptoms.

## **Proposed text for opioids**

SmPC section 4.4: Special warnings and precaution for use

Risk from concomitant use of sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs:

Concomitant use of <product name> and sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs may result in sedation, respiratory depression, coma and death. Because of these risks, concomitant prescribing with these sedative medicines should be reserved for patients for whom alternative treatment options are not possible. If a decision is made to prescribe <Product name> concomitantly with sedative medicines, the lowest effective dose should be used, and the duration of treatment should be as short as possible.

The patients should be followed closely for signs and symptoms of respiratory depression and sedation. In this respect, it is strongly recommended to inform patients and their caregivers to be aware of these symptoms (see section 4.5).

SmPC section 4.5: Interaction with other medicinal products

Sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs:

The concomitant use of opioids with sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs increases the risk of sedation, respiratory depression, coma and death because of additive CNS depressant effect. The dose and duration of concomitant use should be limited (see section 4.4).

PL (section 2), Other medicines and <Product name>:

Concomitant use of <Product name> and sedative medicines such as benzodiazepines or related drugs increases the risk of drowsiness, difficulties in breathing (respiratory depression), coma and may be life-threatening. Because of this, concomitant use should only be considered when other treatment options are not possible.

However if your doctor does prescribe <Product name> together with sedative medicines the dose and duration of concomitant treatment should be limited by your doctor.

Please tell your doctor about all sedative medicines you are taking, and follow your doctor's dose recommendation closely. It could be helpful to inform friends or relatives to be aware of the signs and symptoms stated above. Contact your doctor when experiencing such symptoms.