



OPERATIONAL DIRECTIVE

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Subject: POLICY FOR THE SAFE ADMINISTRATION OF VINCA ALKALOID DRUGS

The policy set out below has been written in response to the National Medication Safety Alert issued in December 2005¹ regarding the fatal risks of “wrong route” administration of vincristine (a vinca alkaloid drug). The aim is to minimise the risk of inadvertent administration of vincristine by the intrathecal route. Vincristine must never be administered intrathecally. These policy guidelines were developed by an expert working group of the WA Medication Safety Group (WAMSG) and have been endorsed by the WA Therapeutics Advisory Group (WATAG). They shall apply at all Western Australian public hospitals.

This guideline should be used in conjunction with existing cytotoxic chemotherapy policies and, where applicable, the “Policy for the safe administration of intrathecal chemotherapy”. Standardisation across the health sector is considered one of the principles of medication safety. Therefore this policy mandates standard packaging and labelling for vinca alkaloids irrespective of whether intrathecal chemotherapy is administered within a given institution.

The guidelines contain provisions for training and education of staff qualified in the preparation, handling or administration of cytotoxic vinca alkaloid chemotherapy. These provisions are strongly recommended to minimise the risk of errors in the administration of vinca alkaloids.

Health Service Managers and Clinical Directors are requested to:

- bring this Circular to the attention of all medical, pharmacy and nursing staff;
- ensure that local policies and procedures comply with the requirements of this policy; and
- implement the provisions of this circular promptly.

Dr Simon Towler
**ACTING DIRECTOR GENERAL
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH**

¹ Medication Alert – Vincristine. Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care. December 2005. www.safetyandquality.org

Western Australian Policy for Safe Administration of Vinca Alkaloid Drugs

1. All medical, nursing and pharmacy staff at all grades of must should receive education and training according to their professional role or as part of a formal induction to be considered qualified to prescribe, dispense, check or administer vinca alkaloid drugs.
2. **Vinca alkaloid drugs must always be administered intravenously.**
3. A warning must be appended to prepared doses of vinca alkaloids and in keeping with the Product Information, this warning should read "**WARNING - For intravenous use only. FATAL if given by any other route**". Variation of this wording may produce inconsistencies with the Product Information which may be of legal significance.
4. Administration of vinca alkaloid drugs

4A Adult setting

Vinca alkaloid drugs must be administered intravenously. Standardisation of injection volume is strongly advised by use of a 50 mL mini-bag containing 0.9% saline or 5% glucose.

Note: Dosing is complex. In keeping with the Product Information, the dose must be calculated by a person skilled in this task. The total mg dose of vincristine to be added to the 50 mL mini-bag must be verified by a second skilled person.

4B Paediatric setting

Vinca alkaloid administration to children is under the control of the Department of Paediatric Haematology/Oncology at Princess Margaret Hospital, whether on-site or elsewhere in Western Australia and is governed by their Operating Procedure. This Operating Procedure is available from the Head of the Department of Haematology/Oncology, Princess Margaret Hospital.