Policy for the use of oral/enteral syringes in the safer measurement and administration of liquid medicines via oral and other enteral routes

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1.0 Introduction

The use of intravenous syringes for the measurement and administration of oral medicines has resulted in inadvertent administration of oral medication via the parenteral route. Oral/enteral syringes stocked in this Trust have different tips that are incompatible with IV equipment thus reducing the risk of this type of incident. The oral/enteral syringes are compatible with enteral feeding tubes and the purple plunger provides a visual reminder that the medication in the syringe must be administered via the enteral route. In 2007, the National Patient Safety Agency issued a patient safety alert relating to safer measurement and administration of liquid medicines via oral and other enteral routes\(^1\), distributed by DHSSPS for action in Northern Ireland\(^2\).

2.0 Aim

To reduce the possibility of oral medication being administered via the parenteral route.

3.0 Policy

3.1 **IV syringes must never be used to measure or administer liquid oral medicines either orally or through an enteral feeding tube.**

3.2 A medicine cup or 5ml spoon is used to measure and administer liquid oral medication except in the following situations where an oral/enteral syringe is appropriate:

- The dose cannot be accurately measured using a medicine cup or 5ml spoon, i.e. the dose is not 5ml or a multiple of 5ml.
- Administration via an enteral feeding tube.
- Administration from a medicine cup or 5ml spoon is unsuitable e.g. babies and young children.
- Controlled Drug liquid medicines.

3.3 Where an oral/enteral syringe is used, it should have a purple plunger to aid differentiation from other syringes.
3.4 The following oral/enteral syringes and equipment will be routinely stocked

- 1ml, 2.5ml or 3ml low dose oral/enteral syringes with an ENFit® tip
- 5ml, 10ml, 20ml oral/enteral syringes with an ENFit® tip
- 60ml oral/enteral syringes with an ENFit® tip
- 50ml oral/enteral syringes with a catheter tip
- ‘press-in bungs’ to allow removal of the dose from a medicine bottle using an oral/enteral syringe with an ENFit® tip
- ‘medicine straws’ to allow drawing up of a dose from a medicine bottle without a press-in bung or to draw up a dose from a medicine cup.

3.6 Where a dose of a medicine is measured using a 1ml, 2.5ml or 3ml low dose oral/enteral syringe, the dose must be drawn up through a press-in bung or through a medicine straw to ensure accuracy of the measured dose.

3.7 Smaller (less than 50ml) oral/enteral syringes exert a higher pressure, which can split the feeding tube. Oral/enteral syringes, particularly smaller oral/enteral syringes, must not be used to administer medicines until tube patency has been established.

3.8 Oral/enteral syringes will be sterile and latex free.

3.9 To avoid potential contamination of medication and cross infection, oral/enteral syringes are single patient use only.

3.10 In hospital, once an oral/enteral syringe has been used to administer medication to a patient, the used oral/enteral syringe must not come into contact with an original container of medicine again.

3.11 In care facilities, e.g. nursing and residential homes, day care and respite facilities, once an oral/enteral syringe has been used to administer medication to a patient, the used oral/enteral syringe must not come into contact with an original container of medicine until it has been washed and dried.

3.12 A patient may be taking more than one liquid medicine at the same time of day. Where each dose can be measured accurately using a medicine
cup and the oral/enteral syringe is only required for administration, the same syringe can be used to draw up and administer each dose from a medicine cup, provided each dose is administered separately and a medicine straw is used with 1ml, 2.5ml and 3ml low dose oral/enteral syringes.

3.13 In hospital, **used oral/enteral syringes should be discarded after each episode of medicine administration or flushing.**

3.14 In care facilities, **used oral/enteral syringes should be cleaned and dried immediately after each use with fresh, warm soapy water, rinsed and dried with a paper towel. Syringes should be stored in a clean, dry, lidded container labelled for the patient when not in use. The manufacturer’s instructions should be followed for cleaning and number of uses for a syringe. The exception is for patients being fed into the jejunum, who are immunosuppressed where syringes should be disposed after each episode of medicine administration or flushing.**

3.15 In Trust facilities, used oral/enteral syringes should be discarded according to the Trust waste disposal policy.

3.16 Following discharge, oral/enteral syringes may be reused in an individual patient’s home in accordance with manufacturers’ guidance for washing and re-use, if this is deemed safe following a risk assessment carried out by the Community Dietitian/Home Enteral Tube Feeding Co-ordinator.

3.17 Adequate supplies of oral/enteral syringes must be supplied if required to administer the quantity of medication supplied on discharge or to out-patients.

4.0 **Scope of this policy**

The scope of this policy extends to all staff that supply or administer liquid oral medicines.

5.0 **Roles and responsibilities**

5.1 All staff that supply or administer oral medicines must adhere to this policy.
5.2 Managers must ensure this policy is included in training programs for the administration and dispensing of medicines and management of enteral feeding tubes.

5.3 The SHSCT Drugs and Therapeutics Committee is responsible for monitoring adherence to this policy and identifying if review is required earlier than otherwise indicated.

6.0 Equality and Human Rights Considerations

6.1 This policy has been screened for equality implications as required by Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Equality Commission guidance states that the purpose of screening is to identify those policies which are likely to have a significant impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to these.

6.2 Using the Equality Commission's screening criteria, no significant equality implications have been identified. The policy will therefore not be subject to an equality impact assessment.

6.3 Similarly, this policy has been considered under the terms of the Human Rights Act 1998, and was deemed compatible with the European Convention Rights contained in the Act.

7.0 Alternative formats

This document can be made available on request in alternative formats, e.g. plain English, Braille, disc, audiocassette and in other languages to meet the needs of those who are not fluent in English.

8.0 Records Management

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9.0 References

1. NPSA, 28 March 2007, Patient Safety Alert 19: Promoting safer measurement and administration of liquid medicines via oral and other

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enteral routes
http://www.npsa.nhs.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?alId=5317
