

Title: Pan-england evaluation of anticoagulant safety in community pharmacies

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Abstract:

Background Anticoagulants are high risk medicines, frequently identified as a cause of preventable harm and admission to hospital. Serious medication errors have been reported for the newer oral anticoagulants as well as for traditional agents. Whilst warfarin is widely known to health professionals, failure to recognise newer agents as anticoagulants has contributed to various errors. Methods A data collection tool was developed by a multi-stakeholder group, piloted and then made available to all community pharmacies in England. Each pharmacy reviewed all patients prescribed an oral anticoagulant over a 2 week period between November 2017 and February 2018 with electronic data collection via PharmOutcomes®. Results Data was reported on 17,258 patients from 1,210 pharmacies. Most patients were aged over 69 (69%). 48% were prescribed warfarin, 25% apixaban and 23% rivaroxaban. A small number (3%) did not know they were taking an anticoagulant and 14% would not seek advice from a doctor or pharmacist before taking any other medicines. Almost two thirds (62%) had a standard national format alert card and some had an alert card provided by the manufacturer. Pharmacies issued 2,780 standard alert cards during the study. Conclusion This large study has demonstrated that although patients had good awareness of their anticoagulant regimen, a substantial minority were not using standard alert cards. Improved uptake of patient-held alert cards and reinforcing the need to seek professional advice before taking other medicines could prevent errors and improve safety.