Identifying over-the-counter high-risk medications: development of a national high-risk medication list

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1. Introduction

High-risk (high-alert) medications bear a risk of causing significant patient harm when used erroneously (1). However, the current literature on high-risk medications mainly concerns prescription medications. Although over-the-counter (OTC) medicines are considered to be relatively safe, others can cause significant harm (e.g. ASA, paracetamol) (2, 3). In addition, some patient groups, such as elderly patients and patients with chronic conditions, may be more prone to harm. Furthermore, some prescription medicines can be affected by drug-drug interactions with OTC medication resulting in grave consequences. According to our knowledge high-risk medication lists for OTC medication have not yet been introduced in Finland or other countries.

2. Aims

To develop a national OTC high-risk medication list which includes a check list of key safety risks and actions for identifying patients at risk in community pharmacies.

3. Method

International and national literature on medicines information on, and risks associated with, OTC-medicines were reviewed. Based on the identified literature material and experiences from developing high-risk medication lists for hospitals, a national OTC high-risk medication list comprising a check list for identifying patients at risk was developed by a group of national medication safety experts in spring 2017.

4. Results

An OTC-medications high-risk list was developed and will be available in community pharmacies (Table 1). The list includes the identified high-risk OTC-medicines, potential consequences when these medicines are used in error, conditions and patients with increased risk, and a set of questions to identify risk patients.

5. Conclusion

Our project represents international pioneering work in the field of OTC medication safety. Educational material for pharmacies will be developed to facilitate the implementation of the use of the list in community pharmacies. The work will continue by expanding the list to cover also high-risk medications during pregnancy and medicines associated with misuse and abuse potential.

References


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