

Safe vincristine use in Switzerland: Still a long way to go?

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Abstract

Background: Different international organizations recommend safety measures for the use of vincristine to prevent wrong route administrations. A central recommendation is to use infusion bags instead of syringes to prevent confusion with intrathecal chemotherapy. This study aimed to investigate the implementation of safety measures for vincristine and intrathecal chemotherapies in Switzerland.

Method: We conducted a written survey among hospital pharmacies of all general care and pediatric hospitals in Switzerland (n¼102). A responsible person of each hospital pharmacy was invited by email to participate in the online survey in May 2018.

Results: Of 66 responding hospitals (response rate 65%), 27 have a hospital pharmacy preparing parenteral chemotherapy. All of these hospitals prepared vincristine in 2017, while 21 also prepared intrathecal chemotherapy. Of these 21, 16 hospitals prepared vincristine as syringes, with small volume syringes being the most widely distributed dosage form. A switch from syringes to infusion bags was discussed in seven hospitals, and discussions led to plans for switch in two. The most prevalent safety measures were labeling for vincristine and special delivery for intrathecal drugs. Of hospitals preparing both vincristine syringes and intrathecal chemotherapy, four reported to have no safety measures implemented neither for vincristine nor for intrathecal chemotherapy.

Conclusion: International recommendations are not widely implemented in Swiss hospitals. Syringes are still in use and other safety measures are sparsely disseminated. Thus, Swiss vincristine patients are still at an increased risk for wrong route application. Recommendations have to be further disseminated and implementation could be enhanced.

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