Appendix 4

MHRA Guidance on the hierarchy for the use of unlicensed medicines

This hierarchy is provided for guidance only and each case should be considered on its individual merit.

1. An unlicensed product should not be used where a product available and licensed within the UK could be used to meet the patient's special need.

2. Although MHRA does not recommend "off label" (outside of the licensed indications) use of products, if the UK licensed product can meet the clinical need, even "off-label", it should be used instead of an unlicensed product. Licensed products available in the UK have been assessed for quality safety and efficacy. If used "off-label" some of this assessment may not apply, but much will still be valid. This is better than the use of an un-assessed, unlicensed product. The fact that the intended use is outside of the licensed indications is therefore not a reason to use an unlicensed product. It should be understood that the prescriber's responsibility and potential liability are increased when prescribing off-label.

3. If the UK product cannot meet the special need, then another (imported) medicinal product should be considered, which is licensed in the country of origin.

4. If none of these options will suffice, then a completely unlicensed product may have to be used, for example, UK manufactured "specials", which are made in GMP inspected facilities, but which are otherwise un-assessed (GMP inspection of "specials" manufacturers is not product specific). There may also be other products available which are unlicensed in the country of origin.

5. The least acceptable products are those that are unlicensed in the country of origin, and which are not classed as medicines in the country of origin (but are in the UK). For example, the use of products from countries where they are classed as supplements, not pharmaceuticals, and may not be made to expected standards of pharmaceutical GMP. These should be avoided whenever possible.

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