

Shortage of Phenelzine (Nardil®) 15mg tablets

Date: 25th July 2019

Description of product affected

- Phenelzine is a monoamine-oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) licensed for the treatment of depression.¹ It has been found to be effective in patients clinically characterised as 'atypical', 'non endogenous', 'neurotic' or where treatment with other antidepressants has failed.
- NICE supports the use of phenelzine as an antidepressant and as an option in the treatment of social anxiety disorder.^{2,3} Phenelzine is also used in patients with mixed depression and generalised anxiety disorder, panic disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴
- The recommended starting dose is 15mg three times daily which can be increased to four times a day if necessary.⁵ Doses of up to 30mg three times a day can be used in hospitalised patients. Once a satisfactory response has been achieved the dose can be reduced gradually to the lowest suitable maintenance dose.
- Phenelzine may be associated with withdrawal effects if stopped suddenly. Although these are usually mild and self-limiting for some patients, withdrawal effects may be severe. It is advised that the dose should be reduced gradually over at least 4 weeks or longer if withdrawal symptoms emerge. Withdrawal over 6 months is recommended when patients have been taking it as a long-term treatment.
- When switching to an alternative antidepressant, it is advised to leave a 14-day washout period between stopping the phenelzine and initiating the new treatment.^{4,6}

Background

- Kyowa Kirin are the sole supplier of phenelzine tablets in the UK. They will be out of stock for a period of at least three months from the beginning of August until end of October 2019.
- At present it seems possible to import supplies of unlicensed phenelzine tablets whilst there is no stock available in the UK.

Alternative agents and management options

- Phenelzine tends to only be used in difficult to treat patients and many of these have been stabilised on this treatment for a long time.
- Given the difficulties in withdrawing treatment and initiating new treatments in patients stabilised on phenelzine it would seem advisable to maintain them on this treatment using imported supplies if necessary, which would need to be treated as an unlicensed medicine in line with local clinical governance procedures.

Urgent Action

For GP practices:

- GP practices should urgently identify patients prescribed phenelzine 15mg tablets (including the brand Nardil) to ensure patients have sufficient stock of their medication to last during the shortage period.
- Where patients do not have sufficient supplies, practices should liaise with pharmacies directly to ascertain their stock levels as different pharmacies use a range of wholesalers.
- Where an imported product is required to maintain the patients supply of phenelzine 15mg tablets, the prescription should be written in a suitable time frame to allow the pharmacy to order the stock from the importing company before the patient runs out of medication. Ordering of imports may take much longer than the normal ordering process.
- If the patient is unable to obtain supplies, and a pharmacy is unable to import phenelzine, then an URGENT referral should be made to the patient's mental health specialist for advice.
- Counsel the patient and their carers as appropriate about any change to their medication, including where an imported brand may be required, BEFORE any change is made.

For pharmacies:

- Support by checking your current stock levels of these products and informing your local practices.
- Support GPs in counselling patients regarding any change to their medication, including any changes in packaging or appearance of tablets, which may be unusual to a patient.

If there is potential for a patient maintained on phenelzine to run out of supply during this shortage and the pharmacy is unable to import phenelzine, the patient should be urgently referred back to mental health specialist for advice on ongoing clinical management.

References

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5. British National Formulary. Phenelzine monograph. Accessed via Medicines Complete, last updated 11 June 2019. Available: <https://doi.org/10.18578/BNF.762962594>
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Disclaimer: The content of this memo may not reflect national guidance. Some of this memo is based on clinical opinion from practitioners. Users should bear this in mind. Any decision to prescribe off-label must take into account the relevant GMC guidance and governance procedures for unlicensed medicines. Prescribers are advised to pay particular attention to the risks associated with using unlicensed medicines or using a licensed medicine off-label. As with all prescribing, the prescriber is medically and legally responsible for the prescriptions they sign and for their decisions and actions when they supply and administer medicines or authorise or instruct others to do so.