

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
P.O. BOX 5013,
WELLINGTON.

3 June 1974.

CLINICAL SERVICES LETTER NO. 135
TO MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS AND DENTISTS
(Copy to Proprietors of Retail Pharmacies)

Dear Sir/Madam,

LOMOTIL INTOXICATION IN CHILDREN

In recent years there have been overseas reports of poisoning by accidental ingestion or injudicious prescribing of Lomotil. Several deaths have occurred in children.*

The dangers of overdosage were highlighted in the Ninth Annual Report of the National Poisons Information Centre.† In this report the recent death of a child from accidental overdosage was recorded as well as reactions involving some adults. In almost all cases notified to the Centre, toxicity has followed prescribed and not self medication.

This drug is considered to be contraindicated in children under 2 years of age and in patients sensitive to either active ingredient. These contraindications are endorsed by the manufacturers.

*Editorial (1973) Br. Med. J., 2, 678-679.

†Ninth Annual Report. National Poisons Information Centre, December 1973.

PRESCRIPTIONS FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 12

A recent amendment to the Poisons Regulations 1964 provides that where a prescription poison is prescribed for a child under 12 years of age the age of the child is to be shown on the prescription. In the case of a child under the age of 2 years, the age is to be shown in years and months and, in the case of a child over 2 years but under 12 years, the age is to be shown in years.

The age does not have to be shown in words as is the case with narcotics.

METHAQUALONE AND METHYLPHENIDATE

These substances, and their salts, are now Prohibited Substances.* They can only be obtained, on prescription, from a hospital pharmacy and can no longer be obtained from a retail pharmacy under any circumstances.

This measure has been adopted in view of evidence of increasing misuse and abuse of these drugs. Similar legislation for the amphetamines has proved eminently successful in reducing misuse of these drugs.

MERCURY IN THE ENVIRONMENT

There has been a growing awareness in the last decade of the danger of chemicals persisting in the environment, and the element receiving most attention has been mercury. The additional hazards arising from the natural conversion of inorganic mercury to the more toxic methyl and dimethyl mercury are now well documented.

In view of this real concern for the environment, the department's official policy is to support in every way possible reduction in the use of metals and chemicals which may persist in the environment and/or become concentrated in foods.

This is not only relative to public health aspects but also to drugs, and the department favours the use of alternatives to medicaments containing mercury (when these are available) and does not support the distribution of new drugs containing mercury if there are appropriate alternatives.

It is realised that the amount of environmental pollution from use of drugs in man is small, but in order to be consistent it is necessary that the use of mercurial compounds be reduced in all possible ways.

*Methylphenidate (Ritalin), Methaqualone (Melsedin, and an ingredient of Mandrax).

EMPLOYMENT OF AN ASSISTANT OR LOCUM TENENS

Doctors are reminded of the need to notify their local medical officer of health when they employ an assistant or locum tenens. They should supply the name of the doctor to be employed, and state to whom cheques for G.M.S. and maternity claims are to be made payable. Failure to observe these points inevitably leads to delay in payment for services provided.

LETTERS OF REFERRAL

From time to time complaints are received about the inadequacy of information about current and recent therapy when a patient is referred for a second opinion. The complexity of modern therapy has increased the possibility of serious drug interactions occurring. For the safety of their patients, doctors are advised to include this essential information in their letters of referral.

PART CHARGE

Unless a suitable price reduction is made, Sinequan capsules 50 mg will be a part charge under the Drug Tariff from 1 August 1974.

POTASSIUM WITH CHLORIDE EFFERVESCENT TABLETS

Both Chlorvescent and Sando-K brands of the above tablets are available under the Drug Tariff. Because of the hygroscopic nature of these tablets, it is suggested that a special point be made to advise patients that the container must be kept tightly stoppered.

Yours faithfully,



(A. W. S. Thompson),
Director,



(A. H. Paul),
Deputy Director,

Division of Clinical Services.