

POLYMER VIALS INCREASE SAFETY

Improper handling of cytotoxic drugs in your practice can be a costly affair. Is your practice handling cytotoxic drugs in the safest manner possible? As referenced by SICOR, Inc., a leading generic pharmaceutical manufacturer, the average oncology practice experiences at least one vial breakage and hazardous cytotoxic clean up a year. Each one of these spills can lead to exorbitant cleanup and disposal costs to your practice, not to mention possible loss of patient treatment time.

What can be done to prevent cytotoxic drug spills from occurring? A vital precautionary measure in preventing unnecessary breakages is vial safety. To ensure a safer delivery process, some manufacturers package cytotoxins in polymer vials.

Polymer vials are composed of medical grade ethylene random copolymer of polypropylene and offer transparency comparable to glass. Excellent barrier properties, high chemical resistance and breakage resistance make these vials ideal primary packaging for many different applications. SICOR officially began using non-breakable, polymer vials in 1992. With safety in mind, SICOR selects the materials most appropriate to handle each agent they offer.

In deciding whether to make the switch to polymer



vials, SICOR conducted a survey of oncology professionals responsible for administering cytotoxins. When asked if they would switch to a shatterproof vial of chemo from glass, all respondents responded that they would pay a premium of up to 20% for the added safety. One participant stated, "A spill is a pretty big deal. We will look at anything that would improve safety."

According to Stephen Daly, Vice President of Marketing for SICOR, "Although there is a 5% increase in costs to our company in using polymer shatterproof vials versus glass vials, we feel the extra investment is worth the peace of mind that our customers are providing quality cancer care in the safest environment possible. This added value on the part of SICOR does not increase the costs to the physician's practice."

SICOR is dedicated to educating oncology practices on the safe handling of cytotoxins. The company has put an aggressive sales force education program in place and also offers CE programs to educate oncology professionals. Look for these educational programs in future issues of *Oncology Associates* magazine, *OA Member News*.

See below for a checklist of safeguarding your practice against cytotoxic drug spills.

SICOR Inc. is a vertically integrated, multinational pharmaceutical company that focuses on generic finished dosage injectable pharmaceuticals, active pharmaceutical ingredients, and generic biopharmaceuticals. For more information on OA's contracted SICOR products, please refer to p. 5 of the OA Member News.

SAFETY TIPS FOR HANDLING CYTOTOXIC DRUGS

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- > Prepare CDs in a restricted, preferably centralized, area within a biological safety cabinet. Pharmacy and nursing staff preparing these drugs need special training
- > Label prepared drugs in accordance with standard pharmacy labeling practices, and use a distinctive CD warning label.
- > Make sure that spill kits, emergency skin and eye decontamination kits, and material safety data sheets (MSDSs) for the drugs are kept in nursing stations where these drugs are administered. Nurses should be trained in CD spill cleanup procedures specific to the facility.
- > Wear gowns, gloves, and goggles when administering CDs. The ANA recommends that nitrile gloves, or gloves of another synthetic material that has been tested against CDs, be used in order to avoid unnecessary latex exposure. Pull gloves over the gown cuff and avoid contamination while removing them. Wash hands immediately afterward.
- > Make sure that prefilled syringes are no more than three-quarters full. Tubing on iv bags should be primed with non-drug-containing solution and have Luer-Lok fittings to prevent leakage and needlesticks from unnecessary iv piggyback needles. Place a plastic-backed absorbent pad under the tubing during administration to catch any leakage. Immediately discard syringes and needles in a puncture-resistant receptacle.
- > Wear gloves and gowns when handling bodily waste, since most patients will excrete CD metabolites in stool and urine for 48 hours after treatment.
- > Discard all unused CDs and contaminated waste in designated chemotherapy waste containers. Place linens in labeled impervious bags to alert laundry personnel.