Ref. N°: DD/PVCT/3627 /FDA /2025

SAFETY INFORMATION COMMUNICATION

Medical Product category	Title
Gabapentinoids	**Risk of serious breathing difficulty.**

1. Introduction

Reference is made to the regulations governing pharmaceutical products and medical devices, especially Article 23 on safety information and communication.

Rwanda FDA warns about the risk of serious breathing difficulty associated with the use of Gabapentinoids. Referring to the EMA's Committee for Risk Assessment in Pharmacovigilance (PRAC) reviewed signals related to Gabapentinoids and recommended adding warnings about the risk of severe respiratory depression.

Furthermore, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) evaluation shows that the use of these medicines, often referred to as gabapentinoids, has been growing for prescribed medical use, as well as misuse and abuse. Gabapentinoids are often combined with CNS depressants, which increases the risk of respiratory depression. CNS depressants include opioids, anti-anxiety medicines, antidepressants, and antihistamines.

2. Description

Gabapentin and Pregabalin, commonly known as Gabapentinoids, are widely used as antineuropathic pain drugs. Gabapentin is an anticonvulsant agent used in treating various illnesses such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, analgesia, anxiety, neuralgia, restless legs syndrome, and bipolar disorder. Pregabalin is commonly used to treat painful diabetic neuropathy, fibromyalgia, diabetic neuropathy, cancer chemotherapy-induced neuropathic pain, post-herpetic neuralgia, trigeminal neuralgia, and post-operative pain.

As per the available safety data, the use of gabapentin and pregabalin may cause neuropsychiatric-related adverse drug reactions (ADRs) followed by hepatic, cutaneous, and haematological reactions.

Gabapentinoids are commonly co-administered with opioids for prescribed medical uses and abused in combination with opioids. There is less evidence supporting the risk of serious breathing difficulties in healthy individuals taking gabapentinoids alone.

Due to their mechanism of action in the CNS, they are prone to misuse, abuse, and dependence. Respiratory depression, due to gabapentin and pregabalin, has been emerging for the past few years, even in patients who were not concurrently on opioids. Post-marketing studies showed similar effects among patients taking these medications simultaneously with other respiratory suppressants.

It is against this background that Rwanda FDA recommends the following:

3. *Information for the Patients and Caregivers*

- Patients and caregivers should seek medical attention immediately if they or someone they are caring for experiences symptoms of respiratory problems, because these can be life-threatening. Symptoms to watch for include:
    1. Confusion or disorientation
    2. Unusual dizziness or light-headedness
    3. Extreme sleepiness or lethargy
    4. Slowed, shallow, or difficult breathing
    5. Unresponsiveness, which means a person does not answer or react normally, or can not wake them up
    6. Bluish-coloured or tinted skin, especially on the lips, fingers, and toes. Always inform your health care professional about all the drugs you are taking, including prescription and over-the-counter (OTC) medicines and other substances such as alcohol.
- Patients and caregivers should be advised to look out for symptoms of respiratory depression that may arise. These symptoms may include, but are not limited to the following: confusion (disorientation), dizziness, shallow or difficult breathing, unresponsiveness (sleepiness or lethargy), and bluish coloured skin.
- Patients are encouraged to consult their healthcare professional immediately when planning to stop the use of gabapentin or pregabalin-containing medicines.

4. *Information to Healthcare Professionals*

- Healthcare professionals are advised to start gabapentinoids at the lowest dose and monitor patients for symptoms of respiratory depression and sedation when co-prescribing gabapentinoids with an opioid or other CNS depressant, such as a benzodiazepine.

- Patients with underlying respiratory disease, renal dysfunction, and elderly patients are at increased risk and should be managed similarly.
- The management of respiratory depression should include close observation, supportive measures, and reduction or withdrawal of CNS depressants, including the gabapentinoids used for analgesia or seizure control. Gabapentinoids should be tapered before discontinuation.
- Patients should be encouraged to consult their healthcare professional immediately when planning to stop the use of gabapentin or pregabalin-containing medicines.
- Healthcare professionals are urged to report any adverse drug reactions (ADRs) associated with the use of Gabapentinoids to Rwanda FDA via the VigiMobile application available on Rwanda FDA website.

5. *Information for the Marketing Authorization Holders/Manufacturers*

Rwanda FDA is requesting Marketing Authorization Holders to submit an updated SmPC for Gabapentinoids medicines to include the risk of serious breathing difficulty. The product label and/or box warning should also be updated to remind healthcare professionals of the potential effects of Gabapentinoids.

6. *Reporting channel*

Patients and Healthcare Professionals must to report any suspected adverse drug event/reaction associated with Gabapentinoids medicine or any other medical product to the Rwanda FDA by using an online reporting tool called VigiMobile for medicines, which is available on the Rwanda FDA website at *https://vigiflow-eforms.who-umc.org/rw/adr*. or using the online reporting system (PViMS) accessible on *https://pvims.rwandafda.gov.rw/security/landing*.

Sincerely,

RWANDA FOOD AND DRUGS AUTHORITY - RWANDA FDA

Prof. Emile BIENVENU
Director General

7. *References*

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