

DATE: March 18, 2013

TO: All Children's Hospital Providers

FROM: Marvin N. Hall, M.D., Chair, Pediatric Pharmacy,
Nutrition & Therapeutics Committee
Amy Sibold, Pharm.D., Chief Pediatric Pharmacist

RE: Deaths in children following use of codeine

The FDA has issued a new "Boxed Warning" regarding use of codeine for pain relief in children following tonsillectomy and/or adenoidectomy. This is the FDA's strongest warning and expressly makes codeine contraindicated in this population. Additionally, the FDA warning states that for management of other types of pain in children, codeine should only be used if the benefits are anticipated to outweigh the risks.

Codeine is converted to morphine by the liver. Some children (prevalence of 1-29% in different ethnic groups) are ultra-rapid metabolizers. This causes the liver to convert codeine into life-threatening or fatal amounts of morphine in the body.

Alternatively, approximately 7% of the population are "poor metabolizers" of codeine. These patients experience little or no pain relief following administration of codeine.

There are effective and safe alternatives to codeine. Specifically, acetaminophen and hydrocodone (Lortab) may be used as an alternative to "tylenol #3".

For these reasons, the Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee at Children's Hospital strongly encourages you to revise your prescribing practices to exclude codeine entirely for analgesic purposes. Additionally, we will begin auditing use of codeine in the children's hospital with the intention of eliminating its use as an analgesic agent.

If you have questions or comments, please contact Marvin Hall, MD at 423-778-6104 or Amy Sibold, Pharm.D. at 423-778-2191.

For additional details, please reference:
<http://www.fda.gov/Drugs/DrugSafety/ucm339112.htm>