

NATIONAL PBM BULLETIN

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DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS - VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (VHA)
PHARMACY BENEFITS MANAGEMENT SERVICES (PBM), MEDICAL ADVISORY PANEL (MAP),
CENTER FOR MEDICATION SAFETY PSCI (VA MEDSAFE), & VACO SPD

LOOK-ALIKE SAFETY ALERT FOR 0.25% ACETIC ACID AND STERILE WATER FOR IRRIGATION

I. **ISSUE**– A look-alike mix-up occurred between 0.25% Acetic Acid and Sterile Water for Irrigation at one VAMC.

II. **BACKGROUND**

The Baxter-manufactured products 0.25% Acetic Acid Irrigation (Figure left) and Sterile Water for Irrigation (Figure right) are packaged in similar-looking 1000 mL clear plastic bottles. Both bottles have translucent blue safety seals on the caps. The placement, font style, and color are similar for the volume, manufacturer's name, expiration date, and product description. There are two points of distinction between the two labels. First, the color of the font is grey for the 0.25% Acetic Acid product name and light blue for the Sterile Water product name. Second, the shading block for the expiration dates are grey and light blue for the two products, respectively.

VAMedSAFE has received a report where Acetic Acid Irrigation was mistakenly used instead of the protocol-required Sterile Water for Irrigation in a critical care unit patient on a tracheostomy collar. The nurse noticed the incorrect container after approximately one-third of the 1000mL bottle had been used, and the tracheostomy collar trial was stopped. The patient was placed back on the ventilator that night as planned. A slight increase in mucous secretions was noted.

As a result of the incident, an aggregate root-cause analysis (RCA) for medication events was reviewed with recommendations pertaining to the incident. Baxter was notified and will be conducting a label workgroup to assess the issue. Process improvements at the facility include large orange labels on the Acetic Acid bottles (front and back), and staff instruction to ensure that all unused Acetic Acid bottles are returned to SPD.

Within VA, stocking and supply of irrigations fluids are generally provided by Central Supply (SPD); however, variations may exist with pharmacy integration at some sites. Therefore, both pharmacy service and SPD should be made aware of this look-alike safety issue.

III. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Pharmacy must alert SPD and nursing staff of potential look-alike confusion between 0.25% Acetic Acid Irrigation and Sterile Water for Irrigation.
2. Pharmacy should assist SPD in adding warning stickers/labels on bottles of 0.25% Acetic Acid.
3. Unused bottles of Acetic Acid must be returned to SPD when not on order for a particular patient.

IV. **SOURCE**

National Center for Patient Safety (NCPS) incident report from an acute care division in VISN 7.

