



# NATIONAL PBM BULLETIN

December 22, 2004

From: Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Healthcare Group–Medical Advisory Panel

- Item:** **Fentanyl Transdermal System, Fentanyl patch, Duragesic®–25, Duragesic®–50, Duragesic®–75, Duragesic®–100 (mcg/h)**
- General Information:** The VA Pharmacy Benefits Management Strategic Healthcare Group (PBM) was alerted to physicians' requests for cutting fentanyl patches in half before application. The PBM's prescription database for fiscal year 2004 contained one prescription requiring application of one-half fentanyl patch. The NCPS received one report of a patient being instructed to cut a fentanyl patch in half. There has been one published case report of a 22-year old male who had neuropathic pain that was controlled on an oral opioid, but who was switched to transdermal fentanyl. He developed sedation, nausea, and respiratory depression within 60 minutes of applying one fourth of a 50-mcg/h fentanyl patch. Symptoms resolved 60 minutes after removal of the patch piece.
- The product information advises not to cut, damage, or alter the transdermal system in any way. If the system is altered, controlled drug delivery would not be possible. Since the drug reservoir of each patch contains a relatively large amount of fentanyl (which is necessary for maintaining a concentration gradient across the rate controlling membrane), uncontrolled drug release may lead to absorption of a potentially toxic amount of fentanyl.
- Action:** **Effective immediately:**
1. Do not process orders that require cutting fentanyl patches prior to application. The prescriber must be notified of the hazard as soon as possible.
  2. Advise patients receiving fentanyl patches not to cut, damage, or alter the transdermal system before use.
  3. Use an alternate opioid therapy when a patient requires transdermal fentanyl in fractions of the patch sizes available.

Repeated requests for cutting fentanyl patches prior to application

should be referred to the Pharmacy Manager for review by the facility Medication Use or Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee.

Source: Klockgether-Radke A, Hildebrandt J. [Opioid intoxication. Inappropriate administration of transdermal fentanyl]. *Anaesthetist* 1997;46(5):428-9.

Contact: Francine Goodman, Clinical Pharmacy Specialist, Pharmacy Benefits Management SHG (708-786-7862) or Mary Burkhardt, Program Manager, National Center for Patient Safety (734-930-5871).