



06 June 2018

Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Ministerial Correspondence and Public Enquiries Unit
Department of Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Dear Mr Hunt,

RE: National Shortage in Intravenous Furosemide Preparations

We write to you today to highlight an imminent potential major public health problem resulting from the ongoing national shortage of intravenous furosemide preparations.

Intravenous furosemide is the first line treatment for the management of patients admitted to hospital with decompensated chronic heart failure or new onset acute heart failure in order to manage the life-threatening signs and symptoms of acute fluid overload.¹ It is the only licensed intravenous loop diuretic on the market in the UK. In this context, the management of patients with an acute, life threatening condition is dependent upon availability of this medicine and its shortage increases the likelihood of, at best, longer hospital stay, and at worst, avoidable death.

Heart failure is the most malignant form of cardiovascular disease, which outcomes comparable to or worse than most common cancers.^{2,3} Even in the current era of improved management of this condition, in-patient mortality rates for acute heart failure in the NHS remain high at approximately 8.9%.⁴ There were approximately 81,500 heart failure admissions across England and Wales in 2015/16.⁴

There have been reports of supply problems with stocks of various strengths of intravenous furosemide for a number of months. These issues have worsened resulting in national advice that stocks of the most common strengths are depleted and hospitals should remove supplies from non-critical areas and import foreign preparations of intravenous furosemide or alternative non-UK licensed intravenous loop diuretics. Subsequently, there are now reports of foreign preparations also running out.

If this problem continues it will result in many patients coming to harm and ultimately patient deaths. The Board of the British Society for Heart Failure cannot emphasise in strong enough terms the acuteness of this issue.

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The incident needs immediate review and action from the Department of Health & Social Care in order to manage the situation. The Board of the British Society for Heart Failure is keen to liaise with the Department of Health & Social Care in order to coordinate any response. We look forward to your imminent response and help with this matter.

Yours sincerely,

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References

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<http://www.ucl.ac.uk/nicor/audits/heartfailure/documents/annualreports/annual-report-2015-6-v8.pdf>