

Watch Out *for...*

Long-acting insulin in DKA

Watch Out Notice: 11

Date: 14th May 2015

Produced By: Critical Care Governance Group

Authors: Dr J Morris, Dr K Adeniji

What Happened?

- A patient was admitted with DKA and started on a fixed rate insulin infusion as per protocol.
- Although their usual long-acting insulin was prescribed, it wasn't given because staff thought it wasn't needed while still on IV insulin.
- This delayed stopping the insulin infusion - and delayed the patient's discharge from ICU.



The Facts:

- Short acting IV insulin (Actrapid) has a half-life of only 2 ½ minutes – so its effects wear off very quickly on stopping the infusion.
- Subcutaneous insulin must be started **before** stopping an insulin infusion in DKA.
- A patient's usual long-acting insulin (eg Lantus or Levemir) should be **continued** throughout the duration of a fixed rate insulin infusion in DKA.

Protect Your Patients:

- Whenever you prescribe something, discuss it with the bedside nurse. This helps identify prescribing errors and ensures the plan is understood by all.
- If your patient with DKA normally takes a long-acting insulin, ensure this is prescribed and given, even while on a continuous insulin infusion.
- Make sure subcutaneous insulin is given before stopping an insulin infusion in DKA.

