



**Royal
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Law and Ethics Bulletin

Sales of Large Quantities of Paracetamol

A case considered earlier this year by the Investigating Committee has highlighted the need to remind pharmacists to exercise their professional judgement when met with requests for large quantities of paracetamol.

Restrictions on the pack sizes of non-effervescent tablets or capsules of paracetamol available from both pharmacy and non-pharmacy premises were introduced in 1998 following changes to legislation. The changes were designed to improve the safety of over-the-counter painkillers because of the concerns about the number of deaths and serious morbidity connected with overdosing and evidence that many people who intentionally overdose use products that are readily available in the home.

The Medicines (Sale or Supply) (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 1980, as amended, limits the pack size of non-effervescent paracetamol products that can be sold over the counter without prescription. Pharmacies may not sell packs containing more than 32 non-effervescent tablets or capsules and may not lawfully supply more than 100 non-effervescent tablets or capsules, or a combination of both, to any one person at any one time.

Pharmacists are advised to use their professional judgement when meeting a request for large quantities of paracetamol. The appropriateness of supplying more than one pack of 32 paracetamol tablets or capsules should be assessed on a case-by-case basis and pharmacists must be satisfied that a decision to supply (which should be for a justifiable reason), or indeed refusal to supply, large quantities of paracetamol is in the individual's best interests. Pharmacy staff must be appropriately trained to deal with requests for large quantities of paracetamol and be able to recognise when referral to the pharmacist may be necessary.

Pharmacists who sell or supply medicines via the internet should consider whether extra precautions need to be in place. As is the case for face to face supplies, internet pharmacies must be aware of the abuse potential of some OTC medicines and other products and be aware of abnormally frequent requests as well as requests for large quantities. Where there are reasonable grounds for suspecting misuse and / or abuse pharmacists should refuse to make a supply.