

Propofol: Don't Overlook This Drug

If abused, this drug has a high mortality rate

By Kim New, JD, BSN, RN



Propofol is a hypnotic/amnestic agent widely used in procedural and intensive care settings. While not a federally controlled medication, propofol has known abuse potential¹ and consequently has been scheduled in some states.

Regardless of what controls are required or are in place, propofol abuse by healthcare personnel is on the rise.² It is an extremely dangerous drug and its diversion and misuse can pose a substantial risk to staff, patients and the community. There is a high mortality rate among staff who abuse propofol. Members of the community have been harmed by staff that diverted propofol and drove a vehicle under its influence.³

Even where propofol handling standards are not explicit, regulatory investigators and auditors are increasingly asking facilities about their propofol management. Because of the risks, all institutions must make sure that propofol is monitored and secured. Every institution should assess the processes they have in place to reduce the opportunities for the diversion and abuse by staff and others.

Audits within the pharmacy

Audits of propofol should start in the central pharmacy. Determine your state's requirements and whether your

facility treats propofol as a controlled substance. Be sure applicable state requirements and facility practices have been documented in a relevant policy.

Each facility should be undertaking ongoing monitoring of propofol needs and procurement trends. Ask your pharmacist in charge for several months of propofol procurement records. Departments showing increasing volume should be researched to confirm diversion is not the cause for the procurement change.

Inspect storage areas within the pharmacy, particularly those where secondary or overflow stock is located. Ensure propofol is not readily accessible to unauthorized staff or others. Propofol stock takes up considerable space compared to other drugs, so the pharmacy may need to develop innovative security storage approaches.

Audits outside the pharmacy

The best approach for propofol handling outside of the pharmacy is to ask for a report of propofol storage locations and the expected quantities at each. With this report, visit each location and verify on-hand quantities. Discrepancies should be recorded and followed up to determine the cause. Substantial discrepancies should be addressed by the pharmacy and the management of the respective area. Process improvement measures may be necessary to enhance tracking and resolve disparities between expected and actual counts.

Audit steps

When you conduct the audit, there are a number of issues to consider to ensure the storage and use of propofol is under sufficient control and security. See the sidebar for steps to a good baseline audit.

¹ 21 CFR § 1308.13 proposed rule

² Study Shows Rising Rate of Propofol Abuse by Health Care Professionals. *EurekaAlert!* Wolters Kluwer Health, 18 Mar. 2013. Web. 31 Oct. 2015, <http://wolterskluwer.com/company/newsroom/news/health/2013/03/study-shows-rising-rate-of-propofol-abuse-by-health-care-professionals.html>

³ Ibata, David. Driver in Wrong-way Gwinnett Crash to Enter Drug Rehab. *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 13 Sept. 2012. Web. 31 Oct. 2015, www.ajc.com/news/news/crime-law/driver-in-wrong-way-gwinnett-crash-to-enter-drug-r/nR99y/

