July 2015 – March 2016

The Renal Association and the British Renal Society are committed to ensuring the safety of all renal patients. The following safety issues have been identified and addressed between July 2015 and March 2016. Whilst the risk to patients is very small, it is essential that all renal unit staff are made aware and that solutions to these risks are shared. Further details of these issues are available on the Renal Association and British Renal Society website.

Low molecular weight heparin
Low molecular weight heparin is given by injection to prevent and treat clots. NHS England has emphasised that each patient must be assessed to ensure that benefits of treatment outweigh risks, particularly of bleeding, before starting treatment.

Risk of blood loss from a haemodialysis line
A manufacturer has reported to the Medicines & Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) a risk of blood loss caused by leakage at the blood chamber connection in a haemodialysis line due to a manufacturing fault. Faulty lines should be returned to the manufacturer.

Allergic reactions to intravenous iron.
Some allergic reactions to intravenous iron (used to treat or prevent anaemia in renal patients) have been reported to RA-BRS Patient Safety. MHRA guidance on the prevention and management of these reactions remains unchanged.

Antibiotic resistance
NHS England has warned that resistance to antibiotics continues to rise, and has issued guidance to promote the careful use of antibiotics to prevent overuse in order to reduce the development of resistance. https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/psa-amr-stewardship-prog.pdf

Necrotic areas (blackened areas of dead skin cells) on arteriovenous fistulae – update
Rarely, black necrotic areas have developed over fistulae which might result in risk of bleeding and require an operation. It is not known what causes these. RA-BRS Patient Safety has asked for reports of any further episodes and any causes identified.

Needling techniques for arteriovenous fistulae
There remains uncertainty about the balance between benefits and potential problems from using a new method of needling fistulae, called the “Buttonhole” technique. A working party has been reviewing the evidence and experience of renal units and will be publishing a report giving recommendations to renal units. The group will be considering other issues related to vascular access.

Cryptosporidium in water supplies
Cryptosporidium is a parasite which causes diarrhoea in humans, and spreads through infected faeces. A water treatment works was recently contaminated and risks related to dialysis were considered. The Association of Renal Technologists advised that used filters and reject water should be handled with great care, and that water purification methods used on renal units removes this parasite from water.

Rapid response to sepsis
An appropriate and rapid response to the sepsis (severe infection) is a crucial safety objective. The NCEPOD Sepsis web site has valuable guidelines, resources and links for hospitals. http://www.ncepod.org.uk/2015report2/downloads/JustSaySepsis_Summary.pdf

The Renal Association and British Renal Society welcome comments and personal experience to:
Renal Association/British Renal Society Patient Safety at: patientsafety@renal.org