



spotlight on health

Embracing Change In Asthma Treatments

(NAPSA)—If you are one of the nearly 20 million Americans living with asthma, you know how important inhaled medications are to providing fast-acting and reliable relief when it is needed the most. Now an important change is being made to these trusted medications that will make them less harmful to the environment, while continuing to deliver relief to asthma patients.

The United States government requires chlorofluorocarbons (CFC) to be removed from all products—including commonly used asthma inhalers—because CFCs are known to be damaging to the environment. Metered-dose albuterol inhalers containing CFCs will be replaced by more environmentally friendly ones that contain hydrofluoroalkane (HFA). Most important, these HFA-containing inhalers are as effective as the currently used medications.

Understanding Inhalers

Dr. Joseph Diaz, a San Antonio-based, board-certified allergist, stresses that even though these fast-acting HFA inhalers may feel and taste slightly different when used, the lifesaving medicine itself has remained the same for these albuterol-based products and is just as effective as the older CFC inhalers.

“The sensation of the HFA spray will be less forceful than what patients are used to with CFCs; therefore, some patients may think they are not getting enough of their medication. But they are,” says Dr. Diaz. “Studies have shown that these HFA inhalers are just as effective.”

Dr. Diaz notes that this transition is atypical because environmental safeguards have caused the removal of generic medications, leaving only branded ones available. “The good news is there are four ozone-safe products on the market: Proventil® HFA, ProAir® HFA, Ventolin® HFA and Xopenex HFA®. Xopenex HFA is different



Asthma medications are now available in more environmentally friendly inhalers.

from its albuterol counterparts in that it is the only levalbuterol product available. All of these newer products are safe and effective; the prescribing physician can determine which product is best for the individual patient.”

Xopenex HFA is used to treat or prevent narrowing of airways (bronchospasm) in patients 4 years of age and older with reversible obstructive airway disease, such as asthma. Although the active ingredient in Xopenex HFA differs from albuterol, it is currently one of four available “short-acting beta-agonist” HFA inhalers approved by the FDA for metered-dose inhaler (MDI) users. Since there are distinct differences between these four medications, a new prescription is required when transitioning to them. Millions of people suffer from asthma in the United States, making it of utmost importance that these patients talk with their doctors about the safest way to upgrade from their old inhalers.

Easing The Transition

To help ease the transition to these new inhalers and address the concerns of asthma patients already comfortable with the medications they use, a number of the nation’s leading medical and patient-support groups are working to raise awareness about the conversion, to assure patients that these new medications are equally effective and readily available. Experts stress that it is important for patients and health care profes-

sionals to work together to ensure a smooth and timely transition for all patients using these inhalers.

Special Warnings

Like other inhaled beta-agonists, Xopenex HFA can produce a narrowing of the airways called paradoxical bronchospasm, which may be life threatening.

Your health care provider may need to prescribe other medications in addition to Xopenex HFA to help control your asthma. Do not stop taking other asthma medications unless advised by your health care provider.

Xopenex HFA can cause significant heart-related side effects, such as an increase in pulse, blood pressure and/or related symptoms. If you have a heart condition, your doctor will determine if Xopenex HFA is right for you. Use as directed by your doctor or health care provider. Deaths have been reported with similar inhaled medications in asthma patients who use too much medication.

Hypersensitivity reactions (severe allergic reactions) may occur immediately after taking Xopenex HFA. If you experience itching, areas of skin swelling (angioedema), skin rash or narrowing of the airways, these may be signs of a hypersensitivity reaction. Seek immediate medical attention if this happens. If you find that treatment becomes less effective, your symptoms become worse and/or you need to use the product more frequently than usual, you should seek medical attention immediately.

Learn More

For information on asthma and how to effectively manage the disease, consult your physician or visit www.xopenex.com. You can also learn more about asthma from Dr. Diaz and the Allergy, Asthma and Immunology Associates of South Texas at www.allergysa.com. Xopenex HFA is made by Sepracor Inc.