The guideline on Acute Cough published by the Dutch College of General Practitioners (NHG) discourages the use of drugs like codeine (generic) and noscapine, which are available on prescription or over-the-counter from chemists, as there is no evidence for their efficacy, whereas they can have serious side-effects. Prescribing a drug whose efficacy has not been proven and which can have serious and even life-threatening side-effects is incompatible with the notion of a rational prescribing policy.

One of the reports to the Netherlands Pharmacovigilance Foundation (Lareb) involved a 2-year-old child being prescribed noscapine. Since the product information states that noscapine has not been approved for use by children below 3 years of age, this concerns an off-label prescription. If a drug is prescribed off-label, it means that the balance between efficacy and side-effects has not been evaluated for this indication. It is also likely that drugs prescribed off-label cause more side-effects (see the article about off-label prescriptions elsewhere in this issue: pp. 57-58).

If angioedema occurs, the doctor should thoroughly assess the use of other drugs and possible causative factors, like the consumption of peanuts.

References*

2. Productinformatie noscapine (Bisolnex®), via www.cbg-meb.nl.

*The literature refers to the Dutch text

Authors

- Lareb