

## PETHIDINE (Commentary)

### Use of prescription-only medicines by midwives in the UK

Midwives in the UK have been able to administer pethidine on their own authority since 1950. Legislation currently allows them to administer the following prescription-only medicines parenterally in the course of their professional practise without reference to a medical practitioner –

- Ergometrine maleate
- Lidocaine\*
- Lidocaine hydrochloride\*
- Naloxone hydrochloride
- Oxytocins (natural and synthetic)
- Pentazocine lactate
- Pethidine hydrochloride
- Phytomenadione (vitamin K)
- Promazine hydrochloride\*

(administration of the drugs marked with an asterisk only being permitted during childbirth).

In addition, the restrictions that normally apply to the supply or sale (but not to the offering for sale) of most medicinal products does not apply to their supply by a midwife, and this is also true of the following prescription-only medicines –

- Chloral hydrate
- Ergometrine maleate (for oral use)
- Pentazocine hydrochloride
- Phytomenadione (vitamin K)
- Triclofos sodium

The above lists now have quite a dated air

The continuing legal basis for these exemptions was contained in Parts I and III of Schedule 3 of the Prescription Only Medicines (Human Use) Order, 1997; SI 1830.

Some of the above products are now little used, and the lists now look increasingly dated. Pentazocine was once a very popular opioid, but is now very little used. It can certainly cause very unpleasant hallucinations. It also has antagonist as well as agonist properties, and can precipitate painful withdrawal symptoms in patients dependent on other opiates. Promazine, a mild antipsychotic, is also little used now (except occasionally, and a little controversially, to control agitation in the elderly), and not always easy to obtain. The combined preparation of these two drugs, Sparine<sup>®</sup>, which was once very popular, is now only on sale in a few countries.

There is, of course, scope for UK midwives to use a wider range of products than this on their own initiative if this practice is covered by a Patient Group Direction (PGD), but PGDs can not be used to initiate the use of a Controlled Drug.