

GENERAL PRINCIPLES IN THE USE AND STORAGE OF DRUGS AND MEDICAMENTS

Definitions

Drugs are any substances which can be taken into the body and effect the way in which it functions

Medicaments are substances which can be applied externally to the body to change its reaction to an illness or condition. These definitions are not meant to be absolute for clearly some medicaments are also drugs.

Antibiotics are drugs which specifically act to control infections caused by germs (bacteria).

Analgesics are drugs which control the level of pain that a person feels

General

All health workers are involved at some time or another in their work with using medicaments or drugs. To do this effectively and safely the drugs must be available, in a state to be used and kept away from those who do not know how to use them. In this module you meet for the first time drugs; local anaesthetic solution, antibiotics and analgesics. It is therefore important to outline the principles in the use and storage of drugs and medicaments. You will meet more such substances in subsequent modules.

The use of drugs and medicaments

The objective of using drugs or medicaments is that they will help the patient overcome the difficulty with which he or she is faced. They may have a general effect - such as on the mind of the patient lowering anxiety or a local effect such as controlling infection in a specific site. Local anaesthetic is clearly one of the latter type, although it also helps the patient generally to cooperate with the treatment by excluding the pain of the operation.

Generally drugs should be used only when it is known that they will be effective; in other words that the advantages of using them will be greater than the disadvantages of not using them. Before using any drug, the health worker should always check that he or she is sure that the specific drug is effective; that there is no alternative cheaper way of achieving the same benefits for the patient; and that he or she knows the contraindications of using the drug.

Storage of drugs and medicaments

Drugs and medicaments are often mixtures of different substances. They are produced normally for use in a given time - just like food they can go 'off' if not used within a reasonable period. For this reason never order more drugs or medicaments at any one time than you can reasonably expect to use within the time given by the manufacturers as the 'life' of the drug or medicament. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for storage as closely as possible. If, for example, on the packet it says store away from heat and out of the direct sunlight, do not put it on a windowsill exposed to the sun. If possible, put in in a cool place or refrigerator.