MARCAINE® (BUPIVACAINE HCL): POTENTIAL LOOK-ALIKE CONFUSION

I. ISSUE
One local facility noted potential look-alike confusion with bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.25% (10 mL vial) and bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% (10mL vial) due to incorrect similar-colored labeling.

II. BACKGROUND
Pain clinic staff at one site noticed a different color than usual for the labeling of a 0.5% bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 10 mL-vial. Typically, bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.25% vials have BLUE labeling and bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% vials have GREEN labeling (Figure A). However, in this case, it was noted that certain bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% vials also had BLUE labeling (Figure B).

Figure A. Usual labeling distinguishes the separate strengths using different colors to avoid confusion between products.  
Figure B. Labeling in question (discovered at a local facility) uses similar colors for the different strengths, making confusion a possibility.

Local pharmacy reviewed all stock throughout their facility and found four affected vials:
- NDC # 0409-1560-10 for all 4 vials of Marcaine® (bupivacaine HCl) 0.5% (10mL vial)
  - 3 vials with the Lot # 79420DD, Exp. 7/1/11
  - 1 vial with the Lot # 81360DD, Exp. 9/1/11

Hospira was contacted, and according to the manufacturer, no changes have been made in the labelings of either bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.25% (10 mL vial) or bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% (10mL vial). It is not believed that any patients received the affected vials.

III. PROVIDER RECOMMENDATIONS
1. Providers should be aware of the potential for look-alike confusion between bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.25% (10 mL vial) and bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% (10mL vial) due to different color labeling than usual in the above reported lots.
2. Providers should carefully check the dosage on the vial when either bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.25% (10 mL vial) or bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% (10mL vial) is ordered and/or administered.
3. Pharmacy should review their stock for affected product(s) previously mentioned as well as other affected lots that may not yet have been noticed, and ensure that a method is in place to distinguish between bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.25% (10 mL vial) and bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% (10mL vial) in order to avoid future look-alike confusion while the atypical blue labeling of bupivacaine HCl (Marcaine®) 0.5% (10mL vial) is circulating.

IV. REFERENCES
1. VISN 8 Field Information Report.

ACTIONS
- Facility Director (or physician designee): Forward this document to the Facility Chief of Staff (COS).
- Facility COS and Chief Nurse Executives: Forward this document to all appropriate providers who handle these medications (e.g., primary care providers, anesthesiologists, pain clinic staff, pharmacy staff, including contract providers, etc.). In addition, forward to the Associate Chief of Staff (ACOS) for Research and Development (R&D). Forward to other VA employees as deemed appropriate.
- ACOS for R&D: Forward this document to Principal Investigators (PIs) who have authority to practice at the facility and to your respective Institutional Review Board (IRB).