Prescriptions on split tablets
– a common drug related problem
– but unnecessary?

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Background

Prescriptions on dosages with split tablets are common in Sweden. However many elderly have difficulties to handle packs and tablets due to fumbling and impaired vision. Splitting tablets in halves may increase the problem to comply with prescribed treatment.
VAD JOBBAR DI MED NU, TOLIS?

ETT VITAMIN-PILLER SOM MAN BARA BEHOVER TA EN GÅNG OM ÅRET

JÄTTEBRA... MEN OM MAN GLÖMMER ATT TA DET?

DET ÄR INTE LÄTT ATT GLÖMMA
Background 2

All data on all dispensed prescriptions in Sweden are stored in "Apotekets TransaktionsDatabas – ATD"

ATD contains as a text-string the dosage instruction written on the label, pharmacists must attach to the package when dispensed

The text-strings may be used for research
Objective

To examine to what extent dosages with split tablets are prescribed in Sweden
Design

Data on all dispensed prescriptions during one month.

Data included patient gender, year of birth, dispensed drug (ATC-code, name, administration form, strength, pack size) and prescribed dosage.

Drugs: beta blockers, calcium inhibitors, ACE/AII-inhibitors, lipid lowering agents, anxiolytics/sedatives and antidepressants
Prescriptions on split tablets - 07

Administration form: tablets

Main Outcome Measures: numbers and proportions of prescriptions with dosages on split tablets
Results

607,520 prescriptions on 74 different substances were examined.

Dosages with split tablets were prescribed on 9.7% of all prescriptions
(7.8±8.6%; Mean±SD; Md 3.9%; r=0-34%)
Results

Prescriptions on split tablets - 07

- Antidepressants/SSRI’s: 21.4%
- Sedatives/Hypnotics: 22.7%
- Anxiolytics: 14.9%
- Neuroleptics: 7.0%
- Thyroxin: 17.4%
- Lipid lowering agents: 1.1%
- ACE-inhibitors: 6.7%
- Calciumblockers: 2.2%
- Betablockers: 8.6%
Results

The 4\textsuperscript{th} quartile – 19/74 drugs constituted 92.8\% of all prescriptions with split tablets

thyroxin;  
2 beta blockers;  
3 antidepressants and  
3 benzodiazepines
Results

Proportions of prescriptions on split tablets in Sweden with reference to age and gender for levothyroxine (H03), anxiolytics (N05BA), sedatives/hypnotics (N05CD) and antidepressants N06 AB.
Results

Thyroxin and SSRI s were studied separately

Prescribing with split tablets was

"unnecessary" - 50.5 and 44.7%

"avoidable" – 95.3 and 81.8%
Conclusion:

Prescribing of dosages with split tablets is common but in most cases unnecessary.

Reason for the prescribing may be

Physicians may be
- unaware or not updated on available products
- OR want to reduce costs
- OR avoid generic substitution;

Pharmaceutical companies may be unaware of prescribed dosages
Proposal

Allow pharmacists in Sweden to adjust prescribed dosages to licensed and available strength without previous contact with the prescriber
Thank you for your attention!