We read with great interest the editorial of Marc Wybier [1] entitled “Transforaminal epidural corticosteroid injections and spinal cord infarction”. Indeed, our regional pharmacovigilance centre is in charge of the evaluation of all serious neurological complications (i.e. paraplegia, quadriplegia and brain infarction) reported in France after transforaminal and epidural steroid injections. This editorial is useful to inform clinicians about this risk and the importance of reporting to the pharmacovigilance network any cases they could be aware. Effectively, better knowledge of all cases that occurred in France and a good documentation of them should be very useful to guide our conclusion.

However, the so-called “domestic” and unpublished data exposed by Dr Wybier should be interpreted with caution. Effectively, the French data presented in the editorial are still fragmented and result from the preliminary review of spontaneous reports registered in the national pharmacovigilance database, performed in May 2008. According to the good pharmacovigilance practices, these cases reported to the French pharmacovigilance network must be confronted to the spontaneous cases recorded by the marketing authorisation holders (MAH) of all injectable steroids available in France. Potential cases from the MAH will be available in the middle of October 2008. It is therefore too early to draw conclusions about a safer route of injection or a safer product, as Dr Wybier recommended. Since the end of our first review, a new case of paraplegia after interapophyseal injection at the lumbar level was reported. Concerning the suspected products, the cases published worldwide involved most of the injectable steroids available: prednisolone, betamethasone, methylprednisolone and triamcinolone. The MAH data are needed to ensure that no case has been reported with cortivazol and to know if cortivazol is frequently used in this indication, before its use can be recommended.

While awaiting the complete results of the national inquiry, the French Health Products Safety Agency (Afssaps) has decided to address shortly a dear doctor letter in order to inform rheumatologists and radiologists about this serious risk. This letter, written in close collaboration with the pharmacovigilance network and the learned societies of rheumatology and radiology, warns physicians of these neurological complications and recommends a careful assessment of the benefit/risk ratio for each patient.

**Reference**