RESEARCH SUMMARY

Current practice in antifungal prescribing

Patterns of antifungal prescribing in general dental practice

R. J. Oliver, H. S. Dhaliwal, E. D. Theaker and M. N. Pemberton *Br Dent J* 2004; 196: 701–703

Objective

To examine the current practice of antifungal prescribing by GPs in the United Kingdom.

Design

A postal questionnaire circulated to a random selection of 400 dentists.

Outcome measures

The questionnaires were analysed and the responses expressed as absolute and relative frequencies.

Results

Responses to the questionnaire were received from 297 (74.3%) GPs. Nystatin was the most popular choice of antifungal agent that GPs would use, followed by miconazole, amphotericin B and fluconazole. The likelihood of use of miconazole was positively linked to recent date of graduation. Lack of knowledge regarding contraindications and problems with azole antibiotics was found in a significant minority of practitioners (36%).

Conclusions

The present study indicates that azole antifungal agents (especially miconazole) are becoming more widely used by GPs, but that knowledge regarding potential problems with their use is sub-optimal. Nystatin remains the most popular choice of antifungal agent.

COMMENT

This is an interesting study which looks at dentists' use of antifungals and their knowledge of possible complications from such use. The postal questionnaire of 400 dentists had a 74% response rate which is very acceptable for such studies and they gathered information about non-responders to avoid bias. Of interest was the increasing use of miconazole (45%) and to a lesser extent fluconazole (14%) by dentists to treat fungal infections. Unfortunately the questionnaire was very brief and there was no opportunity for the dentist to elaborate on the situations when they would prescribe these drugs. They highlighted that 36% of respondents were honest enough to admit to not being aware of the contraindications of the use of these drugs and this is a cause for concern. A list of contraindications in the questionnaire with the dentist selecting or ranking them may have let us see if they were aware for example of the potentiating effect of warfarin by imidazoles.

The study does not give us any information as to the depth of our ignorance on the contraindications for antifungal therapy. The study questionnaire gives one line for other antifungals and that may well underestimate the number who prescribe or provide advice on soaking denture with hypochlorite, chlorhexidine etc, as it may be interpreted to include only oral preparations given to the patient.

It is interesting to note the increasing use of these antifungal drugs and perhaps an article in this journal outlining their use and abuse would be helpful in the near future.

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IN BRIEF

- Nystatin is the most popular choice of antifungal by GPs in the UK.
- Azoles are a popular choice of antifungal, particularly among more recent graduates, but must be used cautiously because of their possible interactions with other drugs.