CRYSTAL ARTHRITIS

Gout drugs are prescribed despite contraindications

The finding that patients with gout often harbor comorbidities that lead to contraindications to many of the available pharmacologic therapies for gout has been well described. However, the first formal assessment of its kind confirms not only the prevalence of these comorbidities among patients with gout, but also that gout medications are frequently prescribed despite such contraindications.

In their study published in *The American Journal of Medicine*, Robert Keenan and colleagues reviewed the electronic records of the New York campus of the US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and identified an initial cohort of 575 patients with an ICD-9-CM code for gout who were seen at a clinic or hospital during an 18-month period in 2007–2008 (cohort 1). From this group, the investigators established further cohorts—on the basis of fulfilling the American College of Rheumatology criteria for gout (cohort

2; $n = 478$) and documentation of crystal-proven gout (cohort 3; $n = 41$)—in order to confirm the population-based analyses.

The results confirmed that comorbidities are highly prevalent in patients with gout, and that most patients have multiple comorbidities. As well, the rate of contraindications to gout medications (including allopurinol and colchicine) was high. These trends were consistent across the three cohorts.

Further analyses revealed that many patients with gout are prescribed contraindicated drugs. In cohort 3, 48% of those with a contraindication to allopurinol had received at least one prescription for the drug. In cohort 1, colchicine was prescribed to 40.6% of patients with ≥ 1 contraindication to the drug, whereas NSAIDs were prescribed to 18.2% of those with a contraindication to this therapy.

“It is well known that gout patients typically have multiple comorbidities,”

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says Keenan, “so choosing a medication that would not cause another problem or exacerbate an existing issue is not always cut and dry.” The findings of this study draw attention to the potential pitfalls of drug therapy for gout, and highlight how often physicians face uncertainty in choosing the appropriate treatment for their patients.

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Original article Keenan, R. T. et al. Prevalence of contraindications and prescription of pharmacologic therapies for gout. *Am. J. Med.* **124**, 155–163 (2011)