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Mandatory continuing medical education

To the editor: Being aware of the official stand of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) against mandatory continuing medical education¹ I was surprised by the title of the article written by J.L. Chouinard (a staff member of the CMA) — "Compulsory continuing medical education: It's just around the corner" (*Can Med Assoc J* 122: 595, 1980).

The only official stand for mandatory continuing medical education in Canada has been taken by the council of the Manitoba College of Physicians and Surgeons, and to my knowledge such a measure has not yet been implemented. As for professional associations, the College of Family Physicians of Canada is the only one that seems to have reasons to require "credits" in continuing medical education for active membership.

Mr. Chouinard states that "continuing education courses are being considered as prerequisite for membership in medical and specialty soc-

ieties, for specialty recertification, and for relicensure; these are all part of a movement toward mandatory continuing education in Canada in the 1980s" and that "the profession has, to a degree, accepted the apparent inevitability of mandatory continuing medical education — both in Canada and the United States." These claims are in need of stronger substantiation.

As far as our American confrères are concerned, the concept of mandatory continuing medical education is still far from being accepted. Recently, the profession rejected the original acceptance of recertification; specialty boards are now re-considering their course of action (*American Medical News*, Mar. 30, 1979, pp 1, 13, 14).

Probably the synthesis of this new attitude can be found in the recently formulated position statements of the Alliance for Continuing Medical Education: "ACME should reaffirm its position in opposition to mandatory continuing medical education."²

American physicians, who witnessed with dismay how an initial "voluntary activity" can rapidly evolve toward the role of a mandatory life line for the licence to practise medicine, are now redefining the proper function of continuing medical education as an important adjuvant to maintaining competence, but not as a device for assessing incompetence. For once we do not need to follow their example and repeat the same frustrating experience: learning from the mistakes of others represents wisdom.

The stand taken by the CMA is a realistic one and should be supported.

O. GIALLORETO, MD
Fédération des médecins spécialistes
du Québec
Montreal, PQ

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To the editor: I agree with Dr. Gialloredo that the present CMA policy on mandatory continuing medical education is appropriate. The intent of my article was to explain the rationale behind this policy and to indicate that many Canadian physicians, with good reason, still believe that continuing medical education will become compulsory in the future.

Dr. Gialloredo may find that the original title of my article, "Compulsory continuing medical education: the continuing debate", which was changed during the editing process, was more suitable.

J.L. CHOUINARD
Coordinator
Council on medical education
Canadian Medical Association

Powassan virus encephalitis in southeastern Ontario

To the editor: Recently Drs. Michael S. Wilson, Brian A. Wherrett and M.S. Mahdy described a case of Powassan virus encephalitis in Kingston, Ont. (*Can Med Assoc J* 121: 320, 1979). This was the 14th case reported in the world literature and the 3rd recognized in Ontario. We report here another case from Kingston.

Case report

A 7-year-old boy was admitted to Kingston General Hospital Dec. 15, 1979 with a 3-day history of fever, vomiting, increasing lethargy and headache. Six hours after admission he lapsed into coma with deviation of his eyes to the right and weakness of the left arm and leg. The next day he had a diffuse, erythematous rash on the upper body and face that lasted a few hours. He remained comatose for 4 days with fluctuating levels of consciousness, fluctuating neurologic signs and fever. He slowly recovered but severe expressive aphasia and spastic quadriplegia persists up to the time of writing.

Investigations during the acute phase of the illness revealed a blood leukocyte count of $12.6 \times 10^8/l$ (71% neutrophils, 22% lymphocytes, 3% band forms, 3% monocytes and 1% basophils). At lum-

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THERAPEUTIC CLASSIFICATION

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ACTION

IDARAC (floctafenine) is an anthranilic acid derivative which has analgesic and anti-inflammatory properties. Floctafenine has been shown to inhibit *in vitro* biosynthesis of prostaglandins PGE₂ and PGF_{2α}. Gastro-intestinal bleeding, determined by daily fecal blood loss, was shown in one clinical trial to be approximately 1.2 ml after 1600 mg/day of floctafenine compared to 10.4 ml after 2400 mg/day of acetylsalicylic acid.

In normal volunteers, IDARAC was well absorbed after oral administration and peak plasma levels were attained 1-2 hours after administration and declined in a biphasic manner, with an initial (α phase) half-life of approximately 1 hour and 1 later (β phase) half-life of approximately 8 hours. Floctafenine and its metabolites do not accumulate following oral administration of multiple doses.

After oral and intravenous administration of ¹⁴C labelled IDARAC, urinary excretion accounted for 40% and fecal and biliary excretion accounted for 60% of the recovered radioactivity. The main urinary metabolites are floctafenine acid and its conjugate with minimal amounts of free floctafenine.

INDICATIONS

IDARAC (floctafenine) is indicated for short-term use in acute pain of mild and moderate severity.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

IDARAC (floctafenine) is contraindicated in patients with peptic ulcer or in any other active inflammatory disease of the gastro-intestinal tract, and in patients who have demonstrated a hypersensitivity to the drug.

WARNINGS

Use in Pregnancy: The use of IDARAC (floctafenine) in women of childbearing potential requires that the likely benefit of the drug be weighed against the possible risk to the mother and fetus. Use of the drug in women who are nursing is not recommended.

Use in Children: The safety and efficacy of IDARAC in children have not been established and therefore is not recommended. The safety and efficacy of long-term use of IDARAC have not been established.

PRECAUTIONS

IDARAC (floctafenine) should be used with caution in patients with impaired renal function. In clinical trials with IDARAC, dysuria without apparent changes in renal function, was reported. It has not been established whether dysuria is related to dose and/or duration of drug administration.

Patients taking anticoagulant medication may be given IDARAC with caution. Alterations in prothrombin time have been observed only in clinical trials where the administration of IDARAC was extended beyond two weeks.

IDARAC should be used with caution in patients with a history of peptic ulcer or other gastro-intestinal lesions.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

The most commonly occurring side effects reported during IDARAC (floctafenine) therapy were:

Central Nervous System: Drowsiness, dizziness, headache, insomnia, nervousness, irritability.

Gastro-intestinal System: Nausea, diarrhea, abdominal pain or discomfort, heartburn, constipation, abnormal liver function, gastro-intestinal bleeding.

Urogenital System: Dysuria, burning micturition, polyuria, strong smelling urine, urethritis and cystitis.

Allergic-type Reactions: Maculopapular skin rash, pruritis, urticaria, redness and itching of the face and neck.

SYMPTOMS AND TREATMENT OF OVERDOSE

No cases of overdose have been reported with IDARAC (floctafenine). In a case of overdose, standard procedures to evacuate gastric contents, maintain urinary output and provide general supportive care should be employed.

DOSAGE AND ADMINISTRATION

The usual adult dose of IDARAC (floctafenine) is 1 to 2 tablets (200 to 400 mg), 3 to 4 times per day as required. The maximum recommended daily dose is 1200 mg. IDARAC is recommended for short-term management of acute pain.

The tablets should be taken with a glass of water.

IDARAC is not recommended for use in children.

AVAILABILITY

Each tablet of IDARAC contains 200 mg of floctafenine. Tablets are biconvex, cylindrical, yellowish-white, scored on one side with D57 above the breakline and the Roussel logo on the reverse side.

IDARAC is available in bottles of 100 tablets. Store at room temperature, protected from light.

IDARAC is a Schedule F (prescription) drug.

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bar puncture the cerebrospinal fluid had an opening pressure of 250 mm H₂O; the protein and glucose concentrations were 28 and 63 mg/dl respectively, the erythrocyte count was 3 × 10⁶/l and the neutrophil count was 53 × 10⁶/l. Tests for liver function, blood glucose levels and serum ammonia concentrations yielded normal results. Computer-assisted tomography of the brain gave normal results and an electrocardiogram showed diffuse δ-wave activity.

Antibodies to Powassan virus, echovirus and coxsackieviruses and to the viruses causing eastern and western equine encephalitis, California encephalitis and St. Louis encephalitis were absent from the first serum sample (obtained Dec. 16, 1979), but in the second sample (obtained Feb. 7, 1980) the hemagglutinin inhibition titre of antibodies to Powassan virus had risen to 1:80; the titre remained at that level in two subsequent samples.

Comment

This case is of interest for two reasons. First, the child's illness was "out of season", as all but two of the previous cases of Powassan virus encephalitis occurred in the summer, the exceptions occurring in October. Second, our patient lived within 8 km of the patient in the previous report. We may have a reservoir for Powassan virus in the Kingston area, or we may be more aware of the disease following recognition of the first case. The source of the infection in our patient has not yet been identified.

We would like to reinforce the point made by Dr. Wilson and his colleagues that Powassan infection should be looked for in any undiagnosed case of encephalitis. Serum antibodies should be sought for up to 6 weeks after the onset of symptoms, as a rise in antibody titre may not be detected any earlier.

M.W. PARTINGTON, MB, PH D, FRCP[C]
V. THOMSON, MB, B CH
M.V. O'SHAUGHNESSY, PH D
Department of pediatrics
Queen's University
and
Regional Public Health Laboratory
Kingston, Ont.

Some odd patterns of psychotropic self-medication

To the editor: We may be dismissing too readily any modification by our patients of a strictly prescribed chemotherapeutic regimen as noncompliance. Caught in the struggle to overcome our patients' resistance to psychopharmacotherapy, we tend to perceive all such interference as nonsensical, if not dangerous.

Recently, we have started to realize the need for individual tailoring of the dosage^{1,2} owing to the tremendous differences in the bioavailability of drugs.³ Our patients have been telling us this for a long time. The same applies to preferences for a particular brand, although we used to consider them all strictly interchangeable. Some of us may have laughed at our patients' claims that fixed drug combinations did them more good than the identical combination taken separately, and vice versa. We may still have doubts, but we certainly don't laugh any more, since the astounding complexities and intricacies of metabolism and interactions of drugs⁴ are coming to light one after another. We have only started to analyze the possible influence of biological rhythms on the effects of drugs, but our patients have been experimenting with the timing of their medication all along. Maybe they do know something we don't know. They are the only parties in the psychopharmacotherapeutic relationship that experience the effects of psychotropic medication on their subjective well-being.

Having run repeatedly into a few odd patterns of self-medication, or self-adjusted medication, I decided to listen to what my patients had to say. I learned, for example, that the renowned appetite stimulant cyproheptadine hydrochloride is an excellent hypnotic for some patients. Its apparent misuse in such a way may well make sense neurophysiologically. Bedtime use of benzodiazepine tranquilizers has been condoned, and even encouraged as an alternative to other hypnotics.⁴ It is from my patients, too, that I've learned about the daytime use of the benzodiazepines and other nonbarbiturate hypnotics (e.g., methypry-