StChristopher's

PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION ON USE OF TOPICAL OPIOIDS

Topical opioids have been used historically for some centuries but have been introduced into palliative care over the last two decades initially on the basis of some small case studies. More systematic studies confirm that this is an effective and safe treatment for the management of painful wounds once they have been assessed by an experience healthcare professional. Information comes from case reports of patients with a number of painful skin conditions where morphine and diamorphine have been used successfully. This is surprising, as it is known that diamorphine has no intrinsic analgesic activity, however, it has been shown to break down to morphine in solution in vitro (2) Topical opioids appear to be effective when used on mucous membranes, inflamed areas and pressure sores. This would correlate with the discovery of opioid receptors in inflamed tissue in the 1990s (4)

At St. Christopher's, we have used both diamorphine and morphine for several years and on many patients. We have made up a topical preparation on the wards as it is needed. The concentration we have used has been 0.1%, which requires

Morphine or Diamorphine 10mg + Intrasite 10g

It is not known yet whether it is the total amount of the drug or the concentration that is most important but from studies by Zepetella et al (10), we know that the opioid is undetectable in the bloodstream at this concentration.

A product containing 10mg morphine in Intrasite in pre-filled syringes can be made by 'specials' manufacturers and this is more practical when topical morphine is required in the community. However, there is no price agreement on 'specials' so the cost can be very high. The licensed manufacturing unit at Glasgow Royal Infirmary can supply this product for £13 per syringe and they will accept FP10s via any community pharmacy. At this concentration, the product is not a schedule 2 CD so does not have CD storage requirements and can be sent by courier or recorded delivery from Glasgow. To order please provide an FP10 with the order as follows:

Morphine sulphate 10mg in 10ml Intrasite gel Please supply (quantity in words and figures) syringes.

The community pharmacy can order this by copying the FP10 onto a sheet of paper and stamping with the pharmacy stamp and then faxing this to the department or by sending a signed order. The FP10 must then be posted to Glasgow. The product is kept in stock so should arrive in 2 - 3 working days The contact details are in the Special Manufacturers list in the back of the BNF;

Pharmacy Production Unit, Western Infirmary, Glasgow G11 6NT Tel: 0141 211 2754 Fax: 0141 211 1967

Diamorphine has also been successfully added to metronidazole gel 0.75% to provide a concentration of 0.025 - 0.1% diamorphine but there is no commercial or special product available to date.

Margaret Gibbs Hospice Pharmacist August 2015

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