



EPIDEMIOLOGY

ABUSE OF TOPICAL CORTICOSTEROIDS : A RE-APPRAISAL

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Introduction: Topical Corticosteroids (TC) are available as wide range of formulations and are primarily used for their non-specific anti-inflammatory actions and rapid relief of symptoms. However, inadvertent prescriptions by physicians and easy availability over the counter have increased abuse of steroids.

Objective: To evaluate the extent of abuse and misuse of TCs.

Materials and Methods: This is an ongoing prospective questionnaire-based clinical study. Patients with relevant dermatoses reporting to our centre were screened for steroid modified/ induced dermatoses and subjected to a structured questionnaire, if they had used any TC for more than 15 day's duration.

Results: Among 200 patients who are included in this study, 66.5% were suggested use of TCs by their relatives, friends or pharmacists. Improvement was noted by 54.0% while 34.5% had worsening of primary condition.

Most common indications: to clear acne, regain fairness on face and for relief of symptoms of infective dermatoses.

Side effects: reappearance/ exacerbation of acne was most commonly noted (56.8%) amongst whom 45.5% had initial improvement followed by a flare up of lesions. Post-inflammatory hyper-pigmentation (12.0%), hypertrichosis (6.5%) and hypo-pigmentation (2.5%) were other adverse effects noted.

Conclusions: Besides cutaneous adverse effects, steroid addiction, tachyphylaxis and contact dermatitis also need to be borne in mind. Hence, benefits of rational and ethical use and harm of overuse, misuse and abuse should be clearly conveyed to non-dermatologist physicians, non-allopathic doctors, pharmacists and patients about proper usage of steroids. Therefore, the authors suggest stringent rules and regulations to curb over-the-counter availability of TCs.

