



MEDICAL THERAPIES AND PHARMACOLOGY

TOPICAL STEROID MISUSE IN RURAL INDIA - A SILENT EPIDEMIC

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Background: There is an alarming increase in instances of topical steroid (TS) misuse in India. However, data is lacking about the depth of this problem in rural India.

Objective: To assess the magnitude, causes, characteristics and consequences of TS misuse in a rural population in India.

Method: A cross sectional study was conducted among the attendees of the dermatology outpatient department of a secondary level hospital, in rural North India between March and May 2016. Those with a history of TS misuse were analysed for their behaviour patterns and outcome with regards to TS usage.

Results: Of the 723 patients, 211 (29.2%) had misused topical steroids. The most commonly misused topical steroid was clobetasol (58.2%). About 70 different creams, produced by a myriad of pharmaceutical companies were recovered from the patients during the study. Both chemists and local healers together contributed to 78% of the sources for steroid misuse. Surprisingly 57.8% perceived their skin conditions to be allergic reactions to diet, even though 70.1% of cases were infact tinea, 10% scabies and 9% acne. 80% with tinea had tinea incognita, while 97% had extension to multiple areas of the body. 85% with scabies had atypical lesions (scabies incognita) and 80% with acne had complications (rosacea or aggravation of acne). Other adverse effects were striae, hirsutism and hyperpigmentation. 63% used TS for less than 6 months and the median expenditure was Rs1,000 (equivalent to 3 days wages of a daily labourer).

Conclusion: Steroid misuse is a grave problem, gradually amounting to epidemic proportion in rural India. This is changing the profile of many common skin conditions. Apart from raising public and professional awareness about the harmful effects of misusing topical steroids, there is also an urgency to tighten regulatory controls over sale and manufacturing of irrational TS combinations.

