BioDrugs

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> Adis Drug Evaluation Silymarin: A Review

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Molecular Biology of Pancreatic Cancer
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Clinical Prescribing of Allergic Rhinitis Medication in the Preschool and Young School-Age Child

What are the Options?

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Abstract

Allergic rhinitis (AR) is the most common chronic condition in children and is estimated to affect up to 40% of all children. It is usually diagnosed by the age of 6 years. The major impact in children is due to co-morbidity of sinusitis, otitis media with effusion, and bronchial asthma. AR also has profound effects on school absenteeism, performance and quality of life.

Pharmacotherapy for AR should be based on the severity and duration of signs and symptoms. For mild, intermittent symptoms lasting a few hours to a few days, an oral second-generation antihistamine should be used on an as-needed basis. This is preferable to a less expensive first-generation antihistamine because of the effect of the latter on sedation and cognition. Four second-generation antihistamines are currently available for children under 12 years of age: cetirizine, loratadine, fexofenadine and azelastine nasal spray; each has been found to be well tolerated and effective. There are no clearcut advantages to distinguish these antihistamines, although for children under 5 years of age, only cetirizine and loratadine are approved. Other agents include pseudoephedrine, an oral vasoconstrictor, for nasal congestion, and the anticholinergic nasal spray ipratropium bromide for rhinorrhoea. Sodium cromoglycate, a mast cell stabiliser nasal spray, may also be useful in this population.

For patients with more persistent, severe symptoms, intranasal corticosteroids



are indicated, although one might consider azelastine nasal spray, which has antiinflammatory activity in addition to its antihistamine effect. With the exception
of fluticasone propionate for children aged 4 years and older, and mometasone
furoate for those aged 3 years and older, the other intranasal corticosteroids including beclomethasone dipropionate, triamcinolone, flunisolide and budesonide
are approved for children aged 6 years and older. All are effective, so a major
consideration would be cost and safety. For short term therapy of 1 to 2 months,
the first-generation intranasal corticosteroids (beclomethasone dipropionate, triamcinolone, budesonide and flunisolide) could be used, and mometasone furoate
and fluticasone propionate could be considered for longer-term treatment. Although somewhat more costly, these second-generation drugs have lower bioavailability and thus would have a better safety profile.

In patients not responding to the above programme or who require continuous medication, identification of specific triggers by an allergist can allow for specific avoidance measures and/or immunotherapy to decrease the allergic component and increase the effectiveness of the pharmacological regimen.

1. Aetiology, Epidemiology and Impact of Allergic Rhinitis (AR) in Children

Allergic rhinitis (AR) is currently the most common of all chronic conditions in children. The disease can be classified as seasonal or perennial, depending on when the child appears to have symptoms most predominantly. Those children with seasonal allergic rhinitis (SAR) have symptoms predominantly in the spring and fall generally due to tree, grass and weed pollen, and occasionally mold spores, whereas those with perennial allergic rhinitis (PAR) have symptoms all year long secondary to year-round indoor allergens, such as the housedust mite, animal danders, mould spores and cockroach allergens (the latter particularly in the inner city). PAR generally occurs in younger children and is frequently associated with otitis media with effusion and sinusitis, while the SAR pattern is usually seen in older children and adults. The 2 conditions can occur together and are not different diseases; therefore treatment is the same.

A 1988 US survey found AR to be present in 59.7 cases per 1000 children up to the age of 18 years. [1] This probably is an underestimate, since it included only those with SAR or hayfever. A prospective study of 747 children in Tucson, Arizona, found that 42% of families interviewed had a physician diagnosis of AR by the age of 6 years, and half of these children developed this condition in

the first year of life. [2] The prevalence of AR worldwide appears to be similar to that of the United States. [3] The estimated direct expenditure for AR and allergic conjunctivitis in children 12 years of age or less was estimated to be \$2.3 billion in the US in 1996. [4] Risk factors for developing AR include a family history of atopy, serum immunoglobulin (Ig) E levels ≥100 IU/ml before the age of 6 years, higher socioeconomic class, exposure to indoor allergens, and a positive skin test indicating specific IgE antibodies. [5]

AR can have a profound effect on a child's quality of life. Children with AR more likely to demonstrate shyness, depression, anxiety, fearfulness and fatigue compared with nonallergic peers. [6] Furthermore, these children miss 2 million days of school each year in the US, and even when they attend school their ability to learn and process cognitive input is significantly impaired. [7] If left untreated, AR can exacerbate and contribute to symptoms of asthma, sinusitis and otitis media with effusion. [8]

2. Evaluation and Diagnosis

The diagnosis of AR is highly dependent on obtaining a comprehensive history from an older child or from the parent of a younger child. Signs and symptoms in older children with SAR include a history of paroxysmal sneezing, nasal itching, clear rhinorrhoea and red, itchy, watery eyes, par-

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