



PIC QUESTION OF THE WEEK: 7/30/07

Q: Is there a suggested method for administering atomoxetine to a patient unable to swallow capsules?

A. Atomoxetine (Strattera) is a selective norepinephrine re-uptake inhibitor indicated for the treatment of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in children, adolescents, and adults. First approved by the FDA in 2002, the drug is currently available in capsule form in several dosage strengths. On occasion, patients have difficulty swallowing capsules, thus resulting in problems with drug administration. There do not appear to be any published formulas for converting the capsule contents into a suspension, solution, etc. In addition, suggested procedures for converting atomoxetine capsules into a liquid dosage form could not be identified in several on-line compounding sites. The product literature contains a number of precautions related to handling capsule contents and specifically recommends that the capsule not be opened. Atomoxetine is an ocular irritant and can also produce contact dermatitis. Recommendations are provided in the precautions section of the product literature as well as the Medication Guide in the event the drug actually comes in contact with the eyes or hands. According to the manufacturer (TM Durell, MD, written communication, July 19, 2007), there is some stability data that supports opening the capsule and placing it in various beverages. The contents of one 60 mg Strattera capsule dissolved in approximately 2 ounces of grape juice (Welch's®, 100% juice), apple juice (Tropicana®, 100% juice), cranberry juice cocktail (Tropicana®, sweetened cranberry juice) and fruit punch (Gatorade®). Each of these vehicles provided drug stability for up to six hours and resulted in delivery of the full capsule dose. In each case, a five minute standing period was provided to allow for complete dissolution of the drug. Atomoxetine is quite soluble and will dissolve at a concentration of 27.8 mg/ml of water. The bioavailability of atomoxetine administered in this manner was not tested by the manufacturer. Precautions addressed in the product labeling were also repeated in the manufacturer's communication. The potential for contact dermatitis and ocular irritation are repeated and the caregiver is advised to wear gloves when handling the capsules and to wash hands before and after exposure. In the event of ocular or skin contact with the contents of the capsule, the affected area must be immediately lavaged and, if necessary, medical advice should be sought. It must be emphasized that the information provided above should be considered only if all other options are unacceptable. The only available liquid formulation of a drug used to treat ADHD appears to be a 5 mg or 10 mg/5 ml methylphenidate oral solution (Methylin; Alliant).

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