

Rheumatology Shared Care Guidelines

Hydroxychloroquine

Information sheet for GPs

Hydroxychloroquine is of proven benefit as a disease modifying agent in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. Clinical improvement is normally seen within 3 to 6 months after starting treatment. NSAID and simple analgesics should be continued but the doses can be reduced once hydroxychloroquine therapy is established.

Dose Regimen

- 400 mg initially in divided doses, reducing to 200 mg after 6 months.
- The dose can be reduced further depending on response
- Treatment should be discontinued if there is no improvement by 6 months.

Monitoring

- Baseline
 - U&E, LFTs,
 - Ask about visual impairment (which is not corrected by glasses)
 - Record near visual acuity of each eye (with glasses where appropriate) using test type or reading document as recommended by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists.
- Patients should be monitored yearly, enquiring about visual symptomatology, rechecking acuity and assessing for blurred vision using a reading chart.
- Patients should be referred to the Ophthalmologist if
 - visual impairment of eye disease is detected at baseline assessment, It should be noted that in elderly patients there is often coincidental ocular morbidity from cataract, glaucoma and age related maculopathy.
 - they develop changes in acuity or blurred vision (as assessed by reading chart) whilst on treatment. Patients should be warned to stop treatment and also be referred back to the rheumatologist.

Relative Contra-indications

- Pregnancy or contemplating pregnancy. Discuss management with rheumatologist
- Psoriasis
- Pre-existing maculopathy of the eye

Drug Interactions

- Hydroxychloroquine may increase plasma digoxin levels. Serum digoxin levels should be closely monitored in patients receiving combined therapy.

References

SPC (Plaquenil Tablets, Sanofi Winthrop Ltd), August 2000
Royal College of Ophthalmologists, 1998
"Recommendations of Good Practice
in Rheumatology and Dermatology Clinics"
BNF 41, March 2001

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Please consult the manufacturers Data Sheet of Summary of Product of Characteristics for further information.