

Few Retail Clinics Found in Underserved Areas

BY MARY ANN MOON

Retail clinics tend to be located in “advantaged” neighborhoods rather than in the medically underserved areas that they are purported to serve, according to researchers.

In a study that matched the geographic locations of 930 retail clinics across the country with census data on the populations living in those locations,

123 clinics (13%) were found to be situated in underserved areas, according to Dr. Craig Evan Pollack and Dr. Katrina Armstrong of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.

Proponents of retail clinics contend that these venues can increase access to care, particularly for the uninsured, and can serve as an entry point into the health care system. “A recent report ... states that the placement of the clinics is

determined in part by ‘physician shortages and higher uninsured populations,’” the researchers noted.

But their analysis showed that these clinics are much more likely to be located in census tracts characterized by high incomes and low levels of poverty; high percentages of white residents and low percentages of black and Hispanic residents; and higher rates of home ownership and fewer rental units.

This disparity is not due to the “advantaged” location of the chain stores that house these clinics. Nearly one-third of such chain stores are located in medically underserved areas, but these are not the locations where the retail clinics are placed. Moreover, counties in which there were retail clinics had the same number of per capita hospital beds (approximately 2.3 per 1,000 residents) and the same number of general practitioners (2.8 per 10,000 residents) as did counties in which there were no retail clinics.

And despite the known shortage of physicians in rural areas, 96% of the counties in which retail clinics are located are

VECTICAL™ (calcitriol) OINTMENT, 3 mcg/g
For topical use only.
Not for oral, ophthalmic, or intravaginal use.
Not to be applied to the eyes, lips, or facial skin.

BRIEF SUMMARY INDICATIONS AND USAGE:

VECTICAL Ointment is a vitamin D analog indicated for the topical treatment of mild to moderate plaque psoriasis in adults 18 years and older.

CONTRAINDICATIONS

None

WARNINGS AND PRECAUTIONS

Effects on Calcium Metabolism

In controlled clinical trials with VECTICAL Ointment, among subjects having laboratory monitoring, hypercalcemia was observed in 24% (18/74) of subjects exposed to active drug and in 16% (13/79) of subjects exposed to vehicle. However, the increases in calcium and albumin-adjusted calcium levels were less than 10% above the upper limit of normal.

If aberrations in parameters of calcium metabolism occur, treatment should be discontinued until these parameters have normalized. The effects of VECTICAL Ointment on calcium metabolism following treatment durations greater than 52 weeks have not been evaluated. Increased absorption may occur with occlusive use.

Ultraviolet Light Exposure

Animal data suggest that the vehicle of VECTICAL Ointment may enhance the ability of ultraviolet radiation (UVR) to induce skin tumors.

Subjects who apply VECTICAL Ointment to exposed skin should avoid excessive exposure of the treated areas to either natural or artificial sunlight, including tanning booths and sun lamps. Physicians may wish to limit or avoid use of phototherapy in patients who use VECTICAL Ointment.

Unevaluated Uses

The safety and effectiveness of VECTICAL Ointment in patients with known or suspected disorders of calcium metabolism have not been evaluated. The safety and effectiveness of VECTICAL Ointment in patients with erythrodermic, exfoliative, or pustular psoriasis have not been evaluated.

ADVERSE REACTIONS

Because clinical studies are conducted under widely varying conditions, adverse reaction rates observed in the clinical studies of a drug cannot be directly compared to rates in the clinical studies of another drug and may not reflect the rates observed in practice.

Clinical Studies Experience

VECTICAL Ointment was studied in two vehicle-controlled studies (419 subjects), and in one open label study (324 subjects). The table below describes exposure to VECTICAL Ointment in 743 subjects, including 239 exposed for 6 months and 116 exposed for one year.

Four hundred and nineteen subjects were treated with VECTICAL Ointment twice daily for 8 weeks. The population included subjects ages 13 to 87, males (284) and females (135), Caucasians (372) and non-Caucasians (47); with mild (105) to moderate (313) chronic plaque psoriasis.

Selected Adverse Events Occurring in at least 1% of Subjects in the Two Pooled Vehicle-Controlled Studies

	VECTICAL Ointment (n=419)	Vehicle Ointment (n=420)
Discomfort skin	3%	2%
Pruritus	1%	1%

Among subjects having laboratory monitoring, hypercalcemia was observed in 24% (18/74) of subjects exposed to active drug and in 16% (13/79) of subjects exposed to vehicle, however the elevations were less than 10% above the upper limit of normal. The open label study enrolled 324 subjects with psoriasis who were then treated for up to 52 weeks. Adverse events reported at a rate of greater than or equal to 3% of subjects treated with VECTICAL Ointment were lab test abnormality (8%), urine abnormality (4%), psoriasis (4%), hypercalciuria (3%), and pruritus (3%). Kidney stones were reported in 3 subjects and confirmed in two.

Postmarketing Experience

The following adverse reactions have been identified during worldwide post-approval use of VECTICAL Ointment: acute blistering dermatitis, erythema, pruritus, skin burning sensation, and skin discomfort. Because these reactions are reported voluntarily from a population of uncertain size, it is not always possible to reliably estimate their frequency or establish a causal relationship to drug exposure.

DRUG INTERACTIONS

VECTICAL Ointment should be used with caution in patients receiving medications known to increase the serum calcium level, such as thiazide diuretics. Caution should also be exercised in patients receiving calcium supplements or high doses of vitamin D.

USE IN SPECIFIC POPULATIONS

Pregnancy

Teratogenic Effects: Pregnancy Category C.

VECTICAL Ointment contains calcitriol which has been shown to be fetotoxic. There are no adequate and well-controlled studies for VECTICAL Ointment in pregnant women. VECTICAL Ointment should be used during pregnancy only if the potential benefit to the patient justifies the potential risk to the fetus.

Teratogenicity studies with calcitriol were performed in which rats were treated orally at dosages up to 0.9 mcg/kg/day (5.4 mcg/m²/day) and in which rabbits received topical application of calcitriol ointment (3 ppm) to 6.4% of the body surface area. No effects on reproductive or fetal parameters were observed in rats. In rabbits, topically applied calcitriol induced a significantly elevated mean post-implantation loss and an increased incidence of minor skeletal abnormalities due to retarded ossification of the pubic bones. A slightly increased incidence of skeletal variation (extra 13th rib, reduced ossification of epiphyses) was also observed. These effects may have been secondary to maternal toxicity. Based on the recommended human dose and instructions for use, it is not possible to calculate human dose equivalents for animal exposures in these studies.

Nursing Mothers

It is not known whether calcitriol is excreted in human milk. Because many drugs are excreted in human milk, caution should be exercised when VECTICAL Ointment is administered to a nursing woman.

Pediatric Use

Safety and effectiveness in pediatric patients have not been established.

Geriatric Use

Clinical studies of VECTICAL Ointment did not include sufficient numbers of subjects aged 65 and over to determine whether they respond differently from younger subjects. Other reported experience has not identified differences in responses between the elderly and younger patients.

OVERDOSAGE

Topically applied calcitriol can be absorbed in sufficient amounts to produce systemic effects.

NONCLINICAL TOXICOLOGY

Carcinogenesis, Mutagenesis, Impairment of Fertility

When calcitriol was applied topically to mice for up to 24 months, no significant changes in tumor incidence were observed. Concentrations of calcitriol in ointment base of 0 (vehicle control), 0.3, 0.6 and 1.0 ppm were evaluated.

A two-year carcinogenicity study was conducted in which calcitriol was orally administered to rats at dosages of approximately 0.005, 0.03, and 0.1 mcg/kg/day (0.03, 0.18, and 0.6 mcg/m²/day, respectively). The incidence of benign pheochromocytomas was significantly increased in female rats. No other significant differences in tumor incidence data were observed.

In a study in which albino hairless mice were exposed to both ultra-violet radiation (UVR) and topically applied calcitriol ointment, a reduction in the time required for UVR to induce the formation of skin tumors was observed in all groups that received the ointment base, including the vehicle-treated control group, relative to animals that received no ointment but which were exposed to UVR. The time required for UVR to induce the formation of skin tumors did not differ between animals that received plain vehicle and those that received vehicle that contained calcitriol. Concentrations of calcitriol in ointment base of 0 (vehicle control), 0.3, 0.6 and 1.0 ppm were evaluated. These data suggest that the vehicle of VECTICAL Ointment may enhance the ability of UVR to induce skin tumors.

Calcitriol did not elicit genotoxic effects in the mouse lymphoma TK locus assay. Studies in which male and female rats received oral doses of calcitriol of up to 0.6 mcg/kg/day (3.6 mcg/m²/day) indicated no impairment of fertility or general reproductive performance.

Based upon the recommended human dose and instructions for use, it is not possible to calculate human dose equivalents for animal exposure in these studies.

PATIENT COUNSELING INFORMATION

This information is intended to aid in the safe and effective use of this medication. It is not a disclosure of all possible adverse or intended effects. Patients using VECTICAL Ointment should receive the following information:

Instructions for Use

This medication is to be used as directed by the physician. It is for external use only. This medication is to be applied only to areas of the skin affected by psoriasis, as directed. It should be gently rubbed into the skin so that no medication remains visible.

Adverse Reactions

Patients should report any signs of adverse reactions to their physician.

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‘Rethinking the distribution of these clinics may be an important avenue for improving their ... societal benefit.’

DR. ARMSTRONG

classified as metropolitan, the researchers said (*Arch. Intern. Med.* 2009;169:945-9).

“If retail clinics are determined to be a valuable and effective source of care, rethinking the distribution of these clinics may be an important avenue for improving their potential societal benefit,” they noted.

The investigators cautioned that their study was limited by its area-level assessment, which could not examine the clients who attend retail clinics nor measure other aspects of accessibility.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation provided the funding for this study.

In an invited commentary, Dr. Mark D. Smith of the California Healthcare Foundation, Oakland, and his colleague, Margaret A. Laws, noted that retail clinic operators generally do not portray their services as comprehensive care, nor do they claim to focus on underserved populations (*Arch. Intern. Med.* 2009;169:951-3).

“The major operators have positioned their offerings as meeting mainstream customer needs for convenient, timely access to basic care for a subset of needs rather than as an alternative to comprehensive primary care,” they wrote, noting that “most consumers do not have access to basic, acute care after hours and on weekends.” Consumers, therefore, have turned to retail clinics to meet these needs. ■

AMA Opens Online ePrescribing Center

The American Medical Association has launched its online ePrescribing Learning Center to provide physicians with the tools they need to make informed decisions about electronic prescribing. For more information and to access the AMA learning center, visit www.ama-assn.org/go/eprescribing. ■