Topical Dapsone Gel Engenders Screening Requirement

Topical dapsone gel, a new option for the treatment of acne vulgaris, requires screening patients for an enzyme deficiency.

Dermatologists are required to test patients for a lack of the glucose 6-phosphate dehydrogenase (G6PD) enzyme before prescribing Aczone (dapsone) gel, 5% (QLT Inc.). Enzyme-deficient patients should be closely monitored for hemolytic anemia.

Males of African descent are the most likely to lack the G6PD enzyme (10%-14% incidence).

"I would check G6PD enzymes in someone I am concerned about," said Jonette E. Keri, M.D., of the University of Miami. The screening and monitoring may not dissuade dermatologists from use of dapsone gel.

"If this medication will improve my patients' acne, a simple blood test will not affect my decision to prescribe it," said Helen T. Shin, M.D., chief of pediatric dermatology at the Joseph M. Sanzari Children's Hospital of Hackensack (N.J.) University Medical Center.

Efficacy was based on two clinical studies that compared Aczone gel 5% and vehicle in a total of 3,000 patients 12 years and older. After 12 weeks, there was a statistically significant decrease in the number of acne lesions as well as improvements on the Global Acne Assessment Score with treatment vs. vehicle.

Oiliness/peeling, dryness, and erythema were the most common adverse events. "This approval is important in that it gives us a new medication to treat acne. This is the first time we will have topical dapsone, and it’s another option in our armamentarium," Dr. Keri said. Start out slowly with dapsone to monitor response, she advised. "Although there are numerous treatment options for acne, a novel one is always welcome," Dr. Shin said. "We are finding that there is an increasing incidence of resistance to topical as well as systemic antibiotics currently used to treat acne." (SKIN & ALLERGY NEWS, October 2005, p. 1). Neither Dr. Keri nor Dr. Shin had a financial disclosure regarding Aczone gel or QLT Inc.