

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Cantharidin Treatment of Molluscum Contagiosum

Sir:

Rosdahl and colleagues demonstrated that lidocaine-prilocaine cream (EMLA) provided effective local anesthesia for the curettage of molluscum (Acta Derm Venereol 68: 149-153, 1988). They discussed the difficulty of achieving satisfactory analgesia when curetting numerous molluscum lesions in small children.

There is no need to use curettage, liquid nitrogen or other painful procedure in treating molluscum contagiosum in children, since these lesions respond to topically applied cantharidin. Cantharidin is available from several firms in a collodion-type vehicle. The technique was described in 1961 by Funt (1), but has not received the textbook attention it merits (2). I have used it for over fifteen years and during this time have never curetted a molluscum lesion from a child. It is important to be aware that there is great individual variation in the reactivity of cantharidin.

Initially, this should be used by precise application of a small amount to each lesion using a pointed stick; a toothpick is ideal. The patient should be immobilized for three to five minutes until the medication has completely dried to restrict the blistering agent to the lesions. Lesions not responding to open applications should be covered with an occlusive tape after the medication has completely dried. The translucent Blenderm tape is ideal as it is occlusive and yet permits parents to observe the reaction. When blistering begins, the tape is removed.

Usually between two to five such treatments are required to eradicate molluscum lesions. Not only do some lesions fail to respond to the first treatment or two, usually new lesions appear for a time. There have been physicians critical of this approach, describing huge blisters and severe inflammation; this has not been my experience. It is important to apply only small amounts of the cantharidin precisely to the molluscum lesions. Occlusion should only be used on lesions not responding to uncovered applications. When occlusive tape is used, it is mandatory to insure complete drying before applying the tape.

Cantharidin was introduced as a treatment for recalcitrant warts; however, I, like many other physicians, no longer use cantharidin for treatment of warts because of the tendency for satellite warts to appear at the periphery of the blister. This does not happen with molluscum contagiosum. I consider cantharidin the treatment of choice for molluscum contagiosum in children.

REFERENCES

1. Funt TR. Cantharidin treatment of molluscum contagiosum. Arch Dermatol 1961; 83: 504.
2. Funt TR, Mehr KA. Cantharidin: a valuable office treatment of molluscum contagiosum. Southern Med J 1979; 72: 1019.

Received August 15, 1988

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Response to Dr Ernst Epstein's Letter

We would like to thank Dr Ernst Epstein for his comments on the treatment of molluscum contagiosum. Dr Epstein favors the treatment with cantharidin, but mentions at the same

time that, "some lesions fail to respond to the first treatment or two". He also discusses the great individual variation in reactivity to cantharidin. In our experience this substance has given unpredictable response and occasionally painful ulcerations and discomfort. With the routines described in our paper, curettage of molluscum contagiosum is a simple safe and painless procedure.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

International Symposium and Tutorial on Genital Papilloma-virus Infections: Advances in Modern Diagnosis and Therapy. February 3-5, 1989, Hamburg, West Germany. For further information contact Prof G. Gross, Department of Dermatology, University Hospital Eppendorf, Martinistrasse 52, D-2000 Hamburg 20, FRG.

Regional Symposium on Rationale Behind Moisturizers in Dermatology. Mode of action, indications and limitations evaluated by noninvasive methods. Rigshospitalet, Copenhagen, June 15, 1989. For further information contact Dr J. Serup. Department of Dermatology, Rigshospitalet, DK-2100 Köpenhamn, Denmark.

Second International Conference on Melanoma in Venice, October 16-19, 1989. For information write to Secretariat, "Second International Conference on Melanoma", Istituto Nazionale Tumori, Via Venezian 1, I-20133 Milano, Italy.

The 18th World Congress of Dermatology will take place in New York City from June 12-18, 1992. "Dermatology—Progress and Perspectives" is the theme of the six-day program. The preliminary program, abstract forms, and registration materials will be available in December 1990. Further information can be obtained from the 18th Congress Secretariat, 22 Euclid Street, Woodbury, NJ 08096, USA.

BOOK RECEIVED

Handbook of Leprosy edited by W. H. Jopling and A. C. McDougall, 1988, 180 pp, 21 figures, 9 tables. ISBN 0433-17569-9. Price £25.00. Heinemann Professional Publishing, Oxford, England.