

## Letter to the Editor

# Vulvar Pruritus After High-dose Dexamethasone

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RECENT observations have reported perineal irritations in patients receiving high doses dexamethasone [1-3]. While working on the antiemetic action of dexamethasone we have also found a similar phenomenon, namely a vulvar pruritus, related to this drug.

Our therapeutic trial aimed to study the antiemetic effect of high doses of corticosteroids (in association with metoclopramide) in patients treated by emetogenic chemotherapy. Dexamethasone sodium phosphate (Decadron® phosphate, MSD) was given by bolus injection at a dose of 24 mg, 15 min prior to the administration of chemotherapy. One arm received dexamethasone, the other a placebo, in a randomized, double blind study. Both arms received metoclopramide 2 mg/kg i.v. before chemotherapy, 3 mg/kg i.v. during chemotherapy and 1 mg p.o. 10 h after the completion of chemotherapy. Diphenhydramine 50 mg was given i.m. to all patients, before the first dose of metoclopramide.

The patients were divided into several strata

depending on the chemotherapy used and the number of cycles received. The results of the trial are under preparation for publication. They show a minimal advantage of dexamethasone, and a high frequency of vulvar pruritus.

144 patients (85 female) received dexamethasone  
128 patients (76 female) received placebo.

We noted 27 cases of vulvar pruritus among 85 female patients receiving dexamethasone (31.76%) and none in the placebo group. This complication recurred with each subsequent injection of dexamethasone.

One important observation not mentioned in the reports quoted above is the sexual segregation of the perineal irritation. Out of 59 male patients receiving dexamethasone and 52 receiving placebo, only one patient complained of anal irritation which occurred with dexamethasone but persisted after shifting to placebo.

The phenomenon of high dose dexamethasone-related perineal irritation appears in our cases to be restricted to females and presented predominantly as vulvar pruritus.

Accepted 18 September 1987.

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## REFERENCES

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