

Cochrane Corner

Erythromycin may be effective for pityriasis rosea: using the Cochrane controlled trials register

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Pityriasis rosea is one of my favourite general practice dermatological diagnoses. The reasons for this is that it is not very common, it requires some history to be taken, a confident diagnosis can be made in most cases and reassurance can be given to the patient. Some patients are bothered by the itch (not all have this) and some by the cosmetic appearance. The way I found this paper was to go to the Cochrane library and then find

the Controlled Trials Register (you can do this through the College – see below). I entered the term Pityriasis Rosea and seven articles appeared. This was the only one I found on a successful treatment. So far I have tried it on two patients and they both got remission within three weeks, which is shorter than the usual duration. The only concern about this paper is that the patients were not randomised but given treatment on

an alternating basis. That is a system of allocation that is open to bias. The effect seems almost too good to be true, but limited clinical experience is consistent with the finding. Why does erythromycin work? The authors suggest that it may have an anti-inflammatory action as it does in acne. Another explanation may be that the causative organism is a mycoplasma or some other organism that is sensitive to erythromycin.

Pityriasis rosea

	Success	Evidence	Comment
Sharma PK1 Erythromycin 250 mg qid for 14 days	At 6 weeks complete response in 73.33% and none in the placebo group NNT = 1.4	Cochrane Controlled Trials register	Probably effective. The only concern was that the patients were not randomised but alternated

NNT = numbers needed to treat for one remission

References

1. Sharma PK, Yadav TP, Gautam RK, Taneja N, Satyanarayana L. Erythromycin in pityriasis rosea: A double-blind, placebo-controlled clinical trial. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*. 2000 Feb; 42(2 Pt 1):241-4 2000.

Members of the Royal New Zealand College of General Practitioners can have access to the full reviews by contacting Cherylyn Pearson at the College in Wellington. For the access codes to the Cochrane library contact cpearson@rnzcgp.org.nz at the College.