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A two year retrospective study of prescribing patterns Rheumatoid Arthritis

The objective of this study was to survey the prescribing patterns at initiation and maintenance of drug treatment for patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

A retrospective, descriptive survey was done at the Rheumatology Clinic, National Hospital of Sri Lanka. All patients positive for rheumatoid factor who entered the clinic from 1992 to 1995 were included. The starting drug(s) in all, and in patients with a two year follow up, the maintenance and concomitant drug(s) were recorded. Data on clinical features/response was not collected.

42 patients fulfilled the entry criteria and 123 had records up to 2 years. Male to female ratio among the patients is 1:5:4. The age of patients varied from 15 to 80 years.

At initiation the mean number of drugs per prescription (inclusive of vitamins etc) was 3 and the range varied from 1 to 7. A NSAID or paracetamol was prescribed in over 90%; DMARDs and steroids were prescribed less.

All the 123 patients who had records for 2 years received paracetamol at some point. Most patients received treatment with at least two other drugs. Concurrent use of anti-ulcer drugs increased markedly from 59.5% to 90.2%.

Paracetamol was the most commonly used drug and the next was an NSAID. For long term treatment patients required combination therapy, usually paracetamol, an NSAID and another drug. Anti-ulcer drug use increased markedly probably due to adverse effects.