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Chloroquine

Introduction

This under-rated and useful end of life drug is making something of a comeback since it was first promoted by the French suicide manual *Suicide Mode d'Emploi* in 1982. The ready availability of this anti-malarial, either online or over-the-counter in many countries, has contributed to its growing use as a means of providing a reliable death. Cambodian despot, Pol Pot, is believed to have used chloroquine (in conjunction with Valium) on the eve of the announcement by the Khmer Rouge that they planned to hand him over to international authorities for trial.

First synthesised in the 1930s as a substitute for naturally produced quinine, the drug was found to be effective against malaria. However, its widespread use was delayed until after the Second World War, because of concerns over the drug's narrow therapeutic range. Blood levels for effective treatment are in the order of 0.02-0.5 mg/l. However, toxic symptoms have been reported with as little as 0.5 - 1.0 mg/l, and levels of >3.0 mg /l are often fatal.

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Packaging & Availability

The drug is commonly marketed as ‘chloroquine phosphate 250mg’ and comes in blister packets of 20 tablets. Brand names include ‘Avloclor’. When for sale online, a purchase of these tablets will often require the completion of a questionnaire. A vacation to an area where malaria is present, but not chloroquine resistant malaria (CRM) (eg. Peru, Bolivia or other countries west of the Andes) is an excellent reason why one would purchase chloroquine phosphate.



Fig 13.1: Blister pack 250mg Avloclor (chloroquine phosphate) tablets

Dosage

Quantities in excess of 5gm will constitute a lethal blood level of the drug. 250mg chloroquine phosphate tablets have ~150mg of active chloroquine base, so anything in excess of 2 packets (40 x 250mg tablets) would be a lethal dose.

Administration

The drug is taken by mouth whereby it is rapidly and completely absorbed from the gut. Administration involves crushing 50 tablets and then dissolving them in 100ml of water. This method will lead to rapid absorption. However, this small drink will be extremely bitter.

Note: If there are significant concerns over the bitter taste of the drug, the tablets could be crushed into a powder and then repackaged into '00' or '000' gelatine capsules (See the previous Chapter on Cyanide).

The first symptoms of overdose will take place within 30 minutes of ingestion. Death will usually occur within 1 - 3 hours. Drowsiness and dizziness quickly progress to loss of consciousness and shock. Death follows from cardiac arrest.

The Use of Potentiating Drugs

The use of benzodiazepines to potentiate the lethal effect of many drugs has in the past been advised (eg oxazepam or diazepam with propoxyphene or chloral hydrate). However, in the case of chloroquine, this is not needed. The reported protective effect of Valium (diazepam), in particular, has been the

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subject of considerable debate. However, the medical literature reveals that the administration of Valium in cases of severe overdose is a *life-saving* measure. For this reason, intercurrent use of benzodiazepines should likely be avoided.

This is not to say that other drugs cannot be usefully used to increase the lethal effects of chloroquine. For example, alcohol, along with respiratory depressants (barbiturates) or cardiac inhibitors (B blockers) can serve this purpose.



Fig 13.2: Chloroquine Phosphate Tablets

Legal comment

In the UK, Chloroquine can be purchased over the counter at a pharmacy and legally imported in no more than a 3 month's supply if for personal use.

In Australia, Chloroquine, like Amitriptyline, is a Schedule 4 prescription-only medication although it is not listed as a border controlled drug nor restricted within the Customs Regulations. However, the penalties for importation without a medical range from 12 months to five years imprisonment and a fine up to \$720,000, depending on whether there is a risk to harm if used.

In the United States there are some strict requirements that allow medications to be imported for personal use. If these don't apply then there are the possible penalties for importation of up to one year's imprisonment and a \$1,000 fine. However, as long as the supply is in an amount usually considered for personal use then US Customs officers seem to allow the medication to be imported.

Other Drugs - Chloroquine

The RP Test for Chloroquine

The drug scores well on reliability, speed and availability, but relatively poorly on peacefulness.

RP Test for Chloroquine

Criteria	Score
<i>Reliability</i>	<i>8/10</i>
<i>Peacefulness</i>	<i>5/10</i>
<i>Availability</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Preparation</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Undetectability</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Speed</i>	<i>3/5</i>
<i>Safety</i>	<i>5/5</i>
<i>Storage</i>	<i>4/5</i>
Total	<i>36(72%)</i>