

Medical Briefs

An abridged look at current events in and around the health-care industry

Alternative Treatment for Heart Failure

A study published in the Journal of American College of Cardiology shows that valsartan, an angiotensin II receptor blocker (ARB), can significantly reduce heart failure mortality, morbidity and hospitalisation. It also indicated the favourable effects of the drug on disease progression. The study, lead by Prof. Aldo Maggioni, was the largest one ever conducted on the topic of heart failure. Based on its findings, the drug Diovan[®] recently became the only ARB approved for treatment of heart failure in the U.S. and can be used as an alternative to angiotensin converting enzyme (ACE) inhibitors. Use of ACE inhibitors is currently one of the standard therapies for heart failure, but are not prescribed to 20% to 54% of sufferers because of side effects or other factors. In these cases, Prof. Maggioni suggests that valsartan can serve as a safe, effective substitute for ACE inhibitors in the management of heart failure.

Heart failure is currently the fastest growing cardiovascular disease in the world and the most common reason why the elderly are hospitalised.

Diovan (valsartan) Improved Survival and Reduced Hospitalization in Heart Failure Patients Who Did Not Take ACE Inhibitors. Press Release, Basel, Switzerland, October 16, 2002.

GlaxoSmithKline Considers Environment

GlaxoSmithKline (GSK) has announced the availability of a new environmentally-friendly delivery system for its inhaled asthma formulations, Flovent[®] and Ventolin[®] in Canada. New dose inhalers will deliver the medications via a chlorofluorocarbon-free (CFC-free) propellant. The propellant was developed in compliance with the terms of the Montreal Protocol, an international agreement endorsed by more than 170 countries to regulate the use and production of CFCs. "While GSK strives to produce medications that safely and effectively treat medical conditions, we're also committed to protecting the environment," said Dr. Anne Phillips, vice-president, research and development, and chief medical officer at GSK.

There will be no significant change to the appearance of the inhalers, although patients may notice a softer, warmer spray, a slightly different taste and a lighter canister. Patients should be reassured that these differences will not affect the way the medications work.

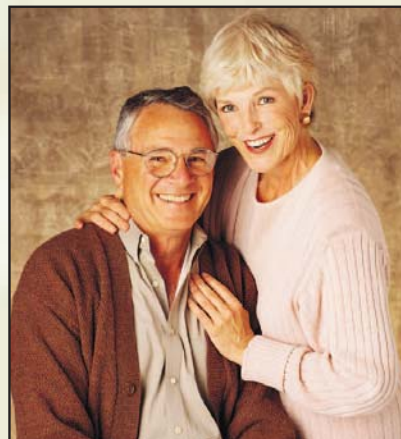
Flovent HFA and Ventolin HFA Inhalers Employ Environmentally-Friendly Delivery System. Press Release, Mississauga, Ontario, October 21, 2002.

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Putting Spotlight on Hypertension

Two million Canadian adults are unaware that they have hypertension. The Canadian Hypertension Society and the Quebec Hypertension Society are trying to change these numbers with the release of the new Hypertension Therapeutic Guide 2002. The guide gives medical practitioners a quick reference tool to assist them in making therapeutic decisions based on the latest scientific studies.

Approximately 4.8 million or 21% of adult Canadians have hypertension, but 43% are unaware they have the problem. Overall, only 13% of people with hypertension are treated and have been successful in lowering their blood pressure to targeted values.



“Hypertension is a major risk factor for stroke, heart failure and heart attack - still the major causes of death in our society - as well as kidney disease,” said Dr. John Floras, Cardiologist, Career Investigator of the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, and current president of the Canadian Hypertension Society. “When hypertension is treated successfully, we can, for example, reduce the risk of stroke in those younger than 60 years of age by as much as 42%.”

The new 2002 Guide is the second edition but the first collaboration between the Canadian and Quebec Hypertension Societies. It contains the results of the most recent clinical studies published up to September 15, 2002 and translates the results of the studies into clear recommendations to help medical practitioners make the best decisions for their patients.

“Major clinical studies have always defined the guidelines for the treatment of hypertension and our guide follows in this tradition,” reported Dr. Yves Lacourcière, president of the Quebec Hypertension Society and director of the Hypertension Clinic and Research Unit at the Centre Hospitalier de l’Université Laval. “Until now, all classes of drugs used to treat hypertension were considered equally effective. However, recent evidence this year has shown that while two drugs may reduce blood pressure equally, one can have the additional impact of lowering the combined risk of cardiovascular disease and death more than the other, something we didn’t know before this year. In other words, the choice of the medication matters. Our guide reflects this information in now recommending ARBs as first line therapy for patients with hypertension.”

Twenty-nine medical experts - including cardiologists, endocrinologists, pharmacologists and general practitioners - guided by editors Dr. Denis Drouin and Dr. Alain Milot, co-authored the 2002 edition. The guide is available in both English and French on the Canadian Hypertension Society Web site at: www.chs.md.

One in Five Adult Canadians has Hypertension and Close to Half of Them Don’t Know it. Press Release, Edmonton, Alberta, October 28, 2002.