

Efudix - New mode of use for skin cancers

You are probably aware that we have a very high incidence of skin cancers in North Queensland. Many of these start as solar keratoses or "sunspots". Over the years many treatments have become available - some are more effective than others.

Efudix (5 fluorouracil) is a local chemotherapeutic agent and has been used since the 60's to treat sunspots although it was only approved for this purpose in Australia in 1991. It is normally used once or twice a day for 3-4 weeks or until the lesions are "eaten away". It produces a marked inflammatory reaction by the end of the first week which can last for several weeks after treatment is complete. Crusting, swelling and excoriation can occur with itching burning and stinging - occasionally the reaction is so severe that strong analgesics (pain killers) are required.

Calcipotriol (Daivonex) was approved for use in Australia in 1994 for the treatment of psoriasis. It causes marked skin irritation and is now only marketed commercially in combination with a steroid ("Daviobet"). It is a derivative of vitamin D and is felt to stimulate the body's own immune system to make antibodies to attack damaged cells.

By combining these two creams treatment time can be reduced to 4-5 days for the face, scalp, ears and decolletage and to 6-10 days for the forearms and the dorsum of the hands. The creams work in different ways - an inflammatory response from fluorouracil and an immune response from calcipotriol.

On the face the response normally starts after 3-4 days of use and peaks by 5-6 days - it has normally completely settled by 10-14 days. On other parts of the body the response may be slower and take longer to settle. The first time the cream is used the response may be slower - response is often more rapid with subsequent-applications.

To use apply a thin layer of the cream to the lesions twice daily until peeling occurs - it can also be used as a "field" treatment. It is a good idea to apply a moisturiser (preferably one with a SPF of 50+) an hour after using the cream. Avoid getting it in your eyes or the corner of the mouth and do not use on broken skin. Wash hands after use.

Clearance rates of lesions are reported to be as high as 90%+. Any lesions remaining after treatment may require alternative treatment such as excision and this treatment is not suitable for pigmented lesions.

Studies have shown a reduced rate of solar keratoses and skin cancers for three years after treatment.

The combination is not yet available commercially - however it is available from a compounding pharmacy and requires a prescription.

Amcal Belgian Gardens Compounding Pharmacy in Belgian Gardens can supply this - cost is currently \$48.95 for a 5gm jar and \$84.95 for a 15gm jar.

A 15gm jar should be sufficient to treat face, scalp, and forearms. We suggest a trial using a small jar initially.

Updated by Maggie Mackay April, 2024.