

Liquid medicines for patients with dysphagia



By Leslie Morgan
Managing Director Durbin PLC.
Morgan is a member of the
Royal Pharmaceutical Society of
Great Britain

When it comes down to what really matters in the health-care industry, it's the individual that counts. Of course, it's true that the majority of patients with similar conditions all respond to similar treatments. But there's always going to be a minority of patients for whom the usual protocols don't work.

One such minority group are those patients who have swallowing difficulties (dysphagia). This problem can often be identified if one or more of the following symptoms are present: dysarthria (imprecise or slurred speech); poor lip closure/drooling; collecting food in the mouth; dysphonia (altered voice quality); reduced ability to cough; coughing at meal times or when drinking; chest infection or gastric reflux. There are a number of neurological, mechanical and psychological conditions that have the potential to cause dysphagia.

These include cerebral palsy, stroke, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, head and neck tumours and invasive surgery.

Dysphagia is also common in the elderly. As well as having an impact on nutrient intakes and energy levels, if the patient is not eating well or at all, dysphagia can also cause problems with patient medication compliance. In a recent study conducted in community pharmacies across the UK where patients over the age of 65 were asked if they had problems swallowing their medication, 62% had experienced difficulty in swallowing solid dose medication at some time and 58% had crushed tablets or opened capsules hoping to make their medicine easier to swallow. Worryingly, 68% said that they would not tell their doctor or pharmacist if they were unable to swallow their tablets.

Recently I met with a number of liquid pharmaceutical manufacturers, offering both UK licensed medicines and 'Specials' (unlicensed medicines formulated and manufactured under a Specials Manufacturing Licence to European GMP standards). I was pleased to learn that a number of medicines that I previously thought of as only available in solid dosage forms are now available in liquid form as well.

I am also used to thinking of tablets and capsules having 3 to 5 years shelf life and tend to think of recently prepared mixtures and liquid antibiotics having a shelf life measured in days. I was therefore pleasantly surprised to hear that these manufacturers can now give liquid medicines 9 to 12 months shelf life (with proven stability data at 25 Celsius) and can offer a 'Certificate of Analysis' upon request.

Durbin's technical team can advise on whether a liquid version of the required product is already available or, if not, how to go about specifying and formulating a 'Special' to meet the requirements of the doctor and the patient.

In countries where these products are not registered, both the UK licensed product and 'Specials' may be supplied to hospitals, primary care centres and pharmacists on a named patient basis, if local regulations allow. This is where Durbin comes in. Our International Sales team source, pack and deliver medicines to doctors, pharmacies, hospitals, pharmaceutical wholesalers and traders, military and government agencies in over 180 countries. No order is too small or too large.

I hope that by raising awareness of the availability of liquid versions of commonly used medicines more individuals will be able to benefit than ever. **MEH**

Durbin PLC is a British company based in South Harrow, London. Established in 1963, the company specialises in supplying quality assured pharmaceuticals, medical equipment and consumable supplies to healthcare professionals and aid agencies in over 180 countries. As well as reacting rapidly to emergency situations, Durbin PLC responds to healthcare supply needs from local project level to national scale programmes. Web address: www.durbin.co.uk Email: L.morgan@durbin.co.uk