
ADVANCES IN THE THERAPY OF GENITAL HERPES

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SUMMARY

In industrial countries, herpes simplex is the most common cause of genital ulcerations. Over the past 15 years, Acyclovir has become established as standard therapy for the management of this viral infection. Since Acyclovir acts specifically on virus infected cells, no cytopathogenic effects are observed on cells not affected by the virus. Thus Acyclovir shows the features of an "ideal pharmacum". Few cases of resistant strains were observed in immunocompromised patients. Major problems arise from the poor absorption rate of Acyclovir after oral ingestion as well as the specific dosage regimens requiring five applications daily. Meantime two succeeding antiviral agents are provided, Valaciclovir and Famciclovir. Both of them have markedly higher bio-availability after oral administration than Acyclovir. Ganciclovir and Foscarnet are alternative agents which are given in selected cases only because of their serious side effects. Still Acyclovir is the antiviral drug of choice in the treatment of genital herpes. Possibly it will be replaced in the future by orally administered nucleoside analogues of better bio-availability.

KEY WORDS

genital herpes, therapy, Acyclovir, Valaciclovir, Famciclovir

INTRODUCTION

Among patients presenting with sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) there has always been observed a high frequency of genital ulcers caused by herpes simplex. It is still a matter of discussion whether nowadays there exists a higher prevalence rate or simply better diagnostic means are available. Additionally patients today seem to be more aware of STDs in general than in former decades. (10)

The causative agent is a double stranded DNA virus belonging to the herpes virus family which in

addition includes the Varicella-zoster-virus (VZV), Epstein-Barr virus (EBV) and Cytomegalovirus (CMV) and the human herpes viruses type 6 and 7. Two different strains of HSV (type 1 and 2) immunologically can be distinguished by a routine method. While formerly HSV 2 was thought to be predominantly responsible for the outbreak of genital herpes, in the past years it has become evident that a rather high percentage of infections is related to HSV 1. (10)

Primary infections of adults are typically linked with severe local and even systemic symptoms. Since

