

20 August 1958

Clinical Services Letter No. 5

TO ALL MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS:

Dear Sir/Madam,

ANTIBIOTICS RELATED TO ERYTHROMYCIN

Three of the newer antibiotics, carbomycin, oleandomycin, and spiromycin*, are closely related to erythromycin. Experimental evidence suggests that when a staphylococcus develops resistance to any one of them, resistance to all the others increases in parallel and at about the same rate. As erythromycin is the most effective member of the group, it should be the antibiotic of choice, if one of this series is to be employed at all. The others should be reserved for those rare cases in which they alone are effective.

In this country, as you know, this group of antibiotics has been reserved "for use in the treatment of severe staphylococcal infections or infections resistant to other antibiotics".

Some laboratories have recently been receiving requests for sensitivity tests to oleandomycin and spiromycin. If these antibiotics are used to any considerable extent, there appears to be a distinct risk that they may lead to the emergence of strains of staphylococci resistant not only to themselves, but to the more efficient agent, erythromycin.

References:

L. P. Garrod (1957) *Brit. Med. J.*, 2:57.

Leader (1956) *New Engl. J. of Med.*, 255:1057.

W. F. Jones & M. Finland (1957) *New Engl. J. of Med.*, 256:115 and 257:536.

NOT FOR ALCOHOLICS!

A doctor writes: "A patient of mine has had an unwelcome and unpleasant experience with Oblivon. Apparently it is contraindicated in ex-alcoholics, reprecipitating the habit. It certainly has been so in this case, and with dire results. The phenomenon is noted in the recent Martindale".

("Martindale" gives a reference to two similar cases, quoting the opinion that methylpentynol is dangerous for such patients.)

ITEMS NOT INCLUDED IN THE DRUG TARIFF

If a patient requires a drug which is not normally a charge on the Fund, and cannot reasonably be expected to pay for it, there is no need for the doctor to adopt any irregular means in an effort to get it for him.

A brief statement of the facts, with a prescription, may be sent direct to this Division. The prescription will be returned to the prescriber with a special endorsement, authorising a free supply. No reasonable request of this kind will be refused; although this provision is not intended, of course, to include drugs which are available free under other arrangements, e.g., Fifth Schedule.

Please do not hesitate to write to either of us direct if we can assist in any way with any prescribing problems.

*Trade Names: Carbomycin - Magnamycin
Oleandomycin - Romicil, Matromycin
Spiromycin - Rovamycin

POLYPHARMACY

Everyone who attended Professor M. M. Wintrobe's recent lectures in Wellington must have been struck by his attitude to drug therapy, which amounted to this: Prescribe nothing without good reason, and then let it be one drug only.

One tends to think of shotgun prescribing as a thing of the past, but we still come across examples, some of them very expensive. The following illustrates what Professor Wintrobe meant when he talked of "giving the patient everything, and the kitchen sink":

Mixture:

Vitamin B ₁	100 mg.	Synkamine	5 mg.
Vitamin B ₂	2 mg.	Methyltestosterone	25 mg.
Nicotinamide		Biopar	2 tablets
Pyridoxine		Syrup of raspberry	to 2 drachms.
Ascorbic acid, of each, 50 mg.			

A modest 7½ oz bottle of this cost the Fund £4 14s. 1d. One wonders what the patient would have said, had he been invited to pay for it. An example not to be followed, please!

DANGER: BAD HANDWRITING

Reproduced is a prescription which came to hand lately, which shows how difficult, if not impossible, can be the task of the chemist and pricing officer in reading some doctors' prescriptions. Here is a clue: The four hen scratches at the bottom mean "Certified Extended Supply condition". After that the rest should be easy.

One of us is not noted for his own good handwriting: but everyone must agree that illegible prescriptions can be dangerous.

R. Thompson, M.D., 20
Aspirin 30
Aspirin 30

Aspirin 30
Aspirin 30

Aspirin 30
Aspirin 30

2/4/10

Yours faithfully,

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