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Efficacy and safety of treatment with a topical preparation containing licorice powder and L-ascorbic acid for skin pigmentation in Middle-Easterns

Ramzia Annan

Ramzderm Medico-Aesthetic Skin Center, Lebanon

Introduction: In the treatment of skin pigmentation, drugs such as hydroquinone, retinoids, AHA and vitamin-C are commonly prescribed for patients of Middle-Eastern races as well. Particularly, development of pigmentation due to prolonged use of hydroquinone and serious reddening of the skin associated with the use of high-concentration of retinoids are encountered, hence requiring control with meticulous care. Vitamin-C being a representative tyrosinase inhibitor has become applicable in the treatment of skin pigmentation because of its recently proven ability to block the four different steps during melanin synthesis via synergism with the other agents.

Objectives: This report describes clinical experience with a new solution containing Licorice powder and L-ascorbic acid in the treatment of patients with skin pigmentation.

Patients & Methods: The study population comprised 20 patients with pigmentary disorders of the skin (18 women and 2 men, ranging in age from 30-56 years) whose Fitzpatrick skintypes were III to IV. The drug used in the study contained the following ingredients: 2% Licorice powder, 10% L-ascorbic acid, sodium hyaluronate, benzophenone-4, diazolidinylurea, propylene glycol, triethanolamine, magnesium ascorbyl phosphate, sodium ascorbyl phosphate, methylparaben, propyl parabens and aqua. Each patient received topical application of the drug at this clinic at three weekly visits, and used a home-care preparation with the same ingredients twice daily for a period of three months after the first visit. Pigmented lesions subject to the study treatment were recorded with a clinical examination as to the size and darkness of the pigments prior to and after the treatment, and thereby the therapeutic response was evaluated along with interview outcome scoring as to safety and efficacy.

Results: As for safety, there was only one patient who experienced reddening at the site at 2 months of treatment, leading to discontinuation of the study topical medication. The remaining 19 patients were able to continue the study topical medication during the 3-months period without experiencing pruritus or reddening at all. As for efficacy, the therapeutic response evaluation showed all eviation of pigmentation in 15 patients, with realization of anti-aging effects such as contraction of skinpores and liveliness of the skin in 14 patients.

Summary & Conclusion: Whilst aggressive treatments to enhance efficacy in Middle-Easterns always require attentiveness to the potential risk of complications, the combined topical formulation of licorice powder and L-ascorbic acid has proven to be safe and effective in the treatment of skin pigmentation. However, further investigation in a greater number of patients is yet to be pursued and the present results seem to indicate usefulness of the combined preparation as a brightening dermatologic therapy.

ramziaelannan@yahoo.com

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