To: Shropshire GP Practices  
From: Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group  
Date: 11/10/2019  

Re: Bile acid sequestrants - colestyramine powder for oral suspension 4g (Questran and Questran Light), colesevelam (Cholestagel) and colestipol (Colestid)

Description of product affected
Colestyramine is licensed for use in the following indications \(^1,2\):

- Primary prevention of coronary heart disease in men between 35 and 59 years of age and with primary hypercholesterolaemia who have not responded to diet and other appropriate measures.
- Reduction of plasma cholesterol in hypercholesterolaemia, particularly in those patients who have been diagnosed as Fredrickson’s Type II (high plasma cholesterol with normal or slightly elevated triglycerides).
- Relief of pruritus associated with partial biliary obstruction and primary biliary cirrhosis.
- Relief of diarrhoea associated with ileal resection, Crohn's disease, vagotomy and diabetic vagal neuropathy.
- Management of radiation-induced diarrhoea

The dose used varies between 4g and 36g daily according to the indication. \(^1,2\)

For relief of diarrhoea, it is common practice to use colestyramine off-label to treat “bile acid diarrhoea” where considered clinically appropriate. This condition may be diagnosed using a radionucleotide SeHCAT test. \(^3\) Colestyramine is also used to help reduce the volume of jejunal and ileostomy outputs as a consequence of bowel resection for any cause, \(^4\) and in patients with myeloma treatment induced diarrhoea that is unresponsive to loperamide. \(^5\)

In the BNF it is also listed as being used to accelerate the elimination of teriflunomide and leflunomide when washout is required. \(^6\)

Colestipol \(^7,8\) and colesevelam \(^9\) and have a much more restricted range of licensed indications limited to treatment of hypercholesterolaemia although both may be used in practice to help relieve bile acid diarrhoea. \(^9\)

Background

Bristol-Myers Squibb divested the Questran range to Cheplapharm at the end of July 2019. Questran is out of stock with no further supplies expected until mid-2020. Limited supplies of Questran Light from Cheplapharm are currently available through Alliance Healthcare (stock allocated to branches every fortnight).

Mylan have also recently launched a generic colestyramine light 4g sachet that is available via the usual wholesaler route.

The supply situation for the alternative bile acid sequestrants is outlined below:
- Cholestagel (colesevelam) 625mg tablets (Sanofi) - available
- Colestid (colestipol) plain (Pfizer) – UK licensed stock not available until end October 2019 but unlicensed stock from Norway expected to be available from mid-October.
- Colestid (colestipol) Orange (Pfizer) – out of stock until mid-October 2019.

**Alternative agents and management options**

Given the current issues with some of these agents it would seem prudent to keep patients on their existing treatment for as long as supplies remain available provided they are benefitting from treatment.

If there is a need to switch patients between treatments the following factors should be taken into consideration:

- **Questran Light/colestyramine light** contains 30mg of aspartame per sachet (whereas Questran contains about 3.8g sugar) and this may lead to tolerability issues in some patients with IBS.3

- In switching patients between colestyramine (4g sachet) and colestipol (5g sachet) (or vice versa) it would seem appropriate to switch on a sachet for sachet basis and then titrate according to response if needed (with specialist input if appropriate).

- There is no clear guidance on switching from colestyramine or colestipol to colesevelam. If this turns out to be the only option available, specialist advice will be required.

**Pruritus**

For patients with pruritus due to liver or biliary problems who do not achieve adequate benefit from treatment with a bile acid sequestrant, there are a number of alternative treatments available including menthol in aqueous cream, rifampicin, ondansetron and sertraline.10,11 Specialist advice may be needed to ensure that symptom control is maintained.

**Action**

Pharmacies should check current stocks and levels of use and discuss the situation with relevant specialists to highlight that supplies of these agents may be limited over the next few months and patients may need to be switched between agents. Hospitals may also need to consider providing ongoing supplies for patients under their care, whose supplies are normally provided in primary care, until this shortage is resolved. In circumstances where clinicians are unwilling to switch, pharmacy procurement specialists may need to arrange to import unlicensed supplies.

**References**

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7. Pfizer Limited. COLESTID Orange 5g. SPC, date of revision of the text, 02/2015: [https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/129/smpc](https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/product/129/smpc)
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