Advice from the American College of Rheumatology for Talking to Patients About Shortages of Hydroxychloroquine During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Introduction for Providers

Patients who take hydroxychloroquine are facing medication shortages. Providers who care for rheumatology patients are facing disparate policy recommendations for prescribing and allocation of antimalarials. The American College of Rheumatology regularly updates guidance on allocation of hydroxychloroquine. Clinical guidance from the American College of Rheumatology for the treatment of rheumatology patients during the COVID-19 pandemic are available here. The following are suggested points that rheumatologists and rheumatology health professionals may wish to consider when discussing this difficult issue with patients.

Information for Patients

The problem: Shortages of hydroxychloroquine

Many rheumatology patients have been unable to fill their prescriptions for hydroxychloroquine. Professionals around the world are working day and night in an attempt to ensure an adequate supply of hydroxychloroquine for all patients, including those with rheumatologic conditions. Companies that supply hydroxychloroquine have indicated that they are ramping up production of this drug to help mitigate shortages.

Why the shortage?

Experiments (in cultured cells, not in humans) suggest that hydroxychloroquine has activity against the virus that causes COVID-19. The widely publicized paper describing the use of hydroxychloroquine in COVID-19 patients was very small and had serious design flaws, and so it is impossible to draw any conclusions from that study about the effectiveness of hydroxychloroquine in people. We are waiting for better studies in COVID-19 patients to be completed. In light of the tremendous and urgent need for treatment for COVID-19, it is important to test hydroxychloroquine in COVID-19 patients, particularly in the context of controlled clinical trials run by experts.
What can I do with a limited supply of hydroxychloroquine?

Many rheumatology patients are able to reduce their dose of hydroxychloroquine, or even go off the drug completely, for some time without suffering a flare. If you are faced with a shortage, we will work with you to reduce your dose to make your supply last as long as possible.

Are there alternatives to hydroxychloroquine?

Yes. In the event of a disease flare related to a shortage of hydroxychloroquine, there are other therapies that we can use to control your disease.

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