

Increase in use of newer hypopigmenting agents for bleaching amongst populace: Case report of self-administered intravenous Gluthathione as a Bleaching agent in Nigeria.

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Dear Sir,

A 21-year-old student was referred from the University health service to the emergency department of our hospital with a history of sudden onset chest pain, tightness and difficulty with breathing while receiving an intravenous infusion. The symptoms developed during a self-administered intravenous infusion of dextrose containing 100mg of glutathione, 5mls of vitamin C and 5mls of bovine collagen for skin lightening purposes. Further questioning revealed she had no previous training with administration of intravenous infusion and was not aware she had to let out air in the intravenous giving set before connecting to the cannula. She had received the intravenous infusion every 4th day in the last 3 weeks. She had no obvious risk factors for pulmonary embolism.

The referral letter stated she was dyspnoeic and she was started on oxygen.

However, on examination, she was anxious, her cardiovascular and respiratory system were normal. She was suspected to have a mild pulmonary embolism but further preliminary investigations were not confirmatory.

Psychotherapist was invited for counselling and psychological evaluation. She was discharged thereafter but she refused to show up for a follow-up visit.

Discussion

Skin lightning is commonly reported in women in Nigeria.¹⁻² Various topical agents have been used but many of them are becoming unsatisfactory because of their side-effects. There is a shift to newer agents some of which are systemic so as to avoid these deleterious effects.

Recently, the use of intravenous glutathione for skin lightening is gradually becoming popular in our environment. Oftentimes people get information about these agents from the internet or peers and the use is becoming increasingly popular among students in higher institutions. Interestingly, intravenous GSH is not an approved drug by NAFDAC. On the internet, GSH is usually marketed in combination with other chemicals some of which are injurious to the body and they are marketed as relatively safe to enhance community acceptability. Most times, many of the users of GSH are unaware of it's side effects because the drug is marketed safe online. However, GSH is increasingly been identified with one or more complications when put to use. Side effects such as severe abdominal pain, skin rashes, Stevens Johnson syndrome, toxic epidermal necrolysis, derangement in thyroid and renal function have been reported to be common and some of these can be life threatening.³⁻⁴ Also included are possible dangers resulting from incorrect or improper technique during intravenous administration especially when carried out by untrained persons. Examples of such are introduction of harmful microorganisms that can result in serious infections and potential fatality, injection of air which can lead to embolus which is also potentially fatal as demonstrated in

this case, transmission of hepatitis B and even HIV when needles are shared or recycled.

Secondly, the combination with some other agents poses additional concerns for dangers some of which are serious health issues. Examples include some oral preparations marketed as dietary supplements which were noted to be combined with dangerous compounds like monobenzene which causes irreversible depigmentation and hydroquinone which have been banned by some FDA because of its carcinogenic effect.⁵ Other notable combinations include compounds like vitamin C to increase its absorption, N-acetyl cysteine to boost its level, alpha lipoic acid, other antioxidants like vitamin E, grape seed extract and even human placenta. The injectable form used by the patient was combined with vitamin C and collagen. In a comment by a United States FDA expert named Kim, “consumers should be cautious of any product marketed online with exaggerated claims on safety and effectiveness”, as they may be unaware of the substance they are ingesting or injecting, they should consult their health care practitioner before deciding to use any new product.

It is advised that all health care givers including dermatologists should be alert and more inquisitive of what our service recipients may be taken without notice. There is also a need to intensify health campaign and public enlightenment against bleaching. Strict regulations by NAFDAC is also emphasized and suggested.

“BLEACHING IS DANGEROUS, YOU CAN BE BLACK AND BEAUTIFUL”.

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