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Stability of Frusemide Tablets Repackaged in Dose Administration Aids

Luke Bowen, Martina Mangan, Alison Haywood, Beverley Glass

ABSTRACT

Repackaging tablets into a dose administration aid (DAA) requires that the pharmacist consider the stability of the active pharmaceutical ingredient and the excipients of the drug product. Frusemide is susceptible to photodegradation and is commonly repackaged into DAAs.

Aim: To evaluate the stability (chemical and physical) of frusemide tablets repackaged into DAAs.

Method: Frusemide tablets repackaged into DAAs were evaluated for physicochemical stability over a period of 8 weeks at a controlled room temperature (25 ± 2°C) and other relevant in-use conditions. In addition, photostability studies were performed according to the International Committee on Harmonisation (ICH) guidelines.

Results: Chemical stability was confirmed for all storage conditions, including the ICH light conditions, with the frusemide content within the British Pharmacopoeial range of 95 to 105%. Although the physical stability was confirmed by all tests (weight uniformity, hardness, friability, disintegration, dissolution), storage in a simulated pharmacy environment after one week and exposure to ICH light conditions resulted in a yellow colouration of the tablets.

Conclusion: Although the chemical and physical stability of frusemide was within acceptable limits during the study, the discoloration of the tablets from light exposure is unacceptable. It is recommended that DAAs are stored protected from light immediately after repackaging with frusemide tablets, and that patients are counselled to store the DAA in a cool dark place.

INTRODUCTION

The shelf-life of a drug product may be affected by the intrinsic stability of the active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) and interactions between the API and the excipients. Shelf-life also depends on the dosage form, packaging, manufacturing process, and environmental conditions during transport, storage and use. Instability can lead to:

• loss of potency due to the degradation of the API;
• accumulation of potentially toxic degradation products causing adverse reactions in patients;
• changes in the physical appearance of a product that may affect patient compliance through loss of confidence in the medication.

In addition to chemical decomposition by hydrolysis, oxidation, isomerisation, polymerisation, or photochemical degradation of the API and/or excipients, physical changes in tablet hardness, friability, disintegration, or dissolution rate may lead to altered physical appearance (discolouration) or bioavailability of the drug product.

Manufacturers’ packaging is designed to protect drug products from environmental factors encountered during storage, such as light, air (oxygen, carbon dioxide, other gases), and moisture while ensuring limited interactions between the product and the packaging material. However, this does not guarantee the stability of the API and the drug product on removal and repackaging into a dose administration aid (DAA). Although the stability of a dosage form is often seen to be the responsibility of the manufacturer, this does not include removal from the original packaging. In electing to repack a drug product into a DAA, pharmacists must consider the implications of the transfer to a non-manufacturer pack on drug stability. Despite the widespread use of these devices (due to their benefit in terms of health outcomes and cost of health care) there is little available data on the stability of the drug products when repackaged into such devices. A recent survey of 392 products revealed that, although some information can be obtained from manufacturers, there is still a shortage of short-term stability data for the transfer of drug products into these devices.

Frusemide is commonly used in the treatment of hypertension and is thus likely to be a candidate for DAA use. Additionally, frusemide displays intrinsic instability to light, and was therefore chosen as a model compound to determine the effects of light on repackaging drug products into DAAs.

The photolytic degradation of frusemide commonly involves photo-oxidation, photoreduction, photohydrolysis and photodehalogenation (Figure 1). Solid-state, photochemical degradation takes place on the surface of the drug product usually leaving the interior of the preparation unaffected. Therefore, drug products, e.g. tablets, exposed to UV/visible light, do not necessarily follow any particular reaction order mode, because the rate of degradation depends on the absorptive and reflective properties of the surface layer, which can change during product degradation (e.g. particle size, crystal modification, colour).

Figure 1. Chemical structure of frusemide and sites of photo-degradation

Solid-state frusemide preparations are also susceptible to physical instability, including moisture sorption and desorption, and polymorphic transformations. A study on the storage of frusemide tablets at elevated humidity has shown a significant increase in water content with a subsequent decrease in tablet hardness and disintegration time. Frusemide can exist as a number of different polymorphs each displaying different physicochemical characteristics. In studies conducted on the polymorphs of frusemide it was found that some of these forms are more photostable and display improved dissolution and disintegration profiles than others.

Interconversion of the polymorphs can occur during changes in temperature and storage at high humidity. This interconversion in solid-state preparations during storage can therefore adversely affect the therapeutic efficacy of that product.
**METHOD**

Physicochemical studies were performed on frusemide 40 mg tablets (Uremide) stored at controlled room temperature and two simulated in-use conditions, in a DAA (Webster pak) frequently used in practice, over a period of 8 weeks.13,14 Physical characteristics of the tablets such as weight uniformity, physical appearance, thickness, hardness, friability, disintegration and dissolution rates were monitored and chemical stability was confirmed by high performance liquid chromatography (HPLC). Photostability studies were performed as per the International Committee on Harmonisation (ICH) guidelines and the amount of frusemide quantitated by the validated HPLC method.15 All samples were chosen at random and had a remaining shelf-life of at least two years at the time of sampling. Percentage relative standard deviation and standard error of the mean were determined for representation of accuracy in the measurement. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences was used for ANOVA analysis to determine the level of significance (p < 0.05) of results obtained.

**Storage Conditions**

Considering the shortage of short-term stability data for the transfer of drug products to DAAs, storage conditions were chosen to simulate in-use conditions encountered in situ during storage in pharmacies (i.e. from time of repackaging to dispensing of medication) and in patients’ homes, over a period usually encountered in practice (8 weeks).15 The storage locations were:

- control: protected from light at controlled room temperature (25 ± 2 ºC; 60 ± 5% relative humidity);
- home: blister-side up in a bathroom exposed to a standard fluorescent lighting and indoor indirect daylight (i.e. window-filtered sunlight); and
- pharmacy: blister-side up on a bench top exposed to fluorescent lighting and indoor indirect daylight. Relative humidity and air temperature were recorded using Tinytag plus data loggers.

**Chemical Stability**

A number of HPLC assay methods have been developed to quantify frusemide and its degradation products.16,17 An assay, adapted from these studies, was developed to provide accurate, reproducible and specific quantitation of frusemide in the presence of its possible degradation products.18 The Varian Prostar system consisted of a 240 solvent delivery module, 410 autosampler and a 330 photodiode array detector. The stationary phase was a C18 bondapak (5 µmol, 250 x 4.60 mm) reverse-phase column. A methanolic acetic acid (1%) (Sigma Aldrich) (65:35) mobile phase (pH 3.67) and detection wavelength of 270 nm was used. The flow rate was 1 ±0.1 mL/min and the injection volume, 20 µL. A calibration curve for frusemide was constructed from 15 to 50 µg/mL (r² = 0.999). Triplicate samples were prepared by accurately weighing and finely crushing 15 tablets for each of the storage conditions. The powder was mixed and dissolved in media (900 mL) maintained at 37 ±0.5 ºC. Samples were filtered through a 0.45 µm filter (Millipore) and the filtrate diluted 1:4 with dissolution medium and assayed on a Cary 100 UV/VIS spectrophotometer at 270 nm.

**RESULTS**

**Storage Conditions**

The in-use storage conditions over the 8 week period were recorded as follows:

- In-use (a) ‘pharmacy conditions’ ranged from 22 to 27 ºC, and 33.5 to 78.0% relative humidity; and
- In-use (b) ‘home conditions’ ranged from 21.5 to 30.5 ºC and 27.5 to 95.5% relative humidity.

**Chemical Stability**

Method validation for accuracy, precision, specificity and linearity was carried out as per the ICH guidelines.19 The retention time for frusemide was 4.8 minutes with peak purity determined through spectral library comparison and peak purity determinations (Varian Prostar Polyview 2000) of the respective samples and standard solutions. The absence of co-eluting degradants and excipients was verified with spectral similarities of > 0.999 (photodiode array detection) for the pure and sample frusemide peaks achieved. Linearity was confirmed over the concentration range used (r² = 0.999). Concentrations of frusemide in the samples were determined from respective peak areas in relation to constructed standard curves and then converted to a percentage of the initial frusemide concentration. The amount of frusemide per tablet (vs labelled amount) as a function of storage time is shown in Figure 2. The results showed that the frusemide content was within the range (95 to 105% of labelled amount) specified in the BP monograph for Frusemide Tablets under all storage conditions over a period of 8 weeks.22 The compendial requirements were thus met for all storage conditions.

**Photostability**

Irradiation under the ICH conditions resulted in 98% of frusemide remaining, while 101% was reported for the dark controls. The results therefore show that the frusemide content was within the range of 95 to 100% of the labelled amount. This confirms the minimal degradation occurring to be due to light and not heat (Hereaus Suntest CPS+ was maintained at 40 °C) generated on light exposure. A change in colour to a pale yellow was observed for the samples and not the dark controls.

**Physical Stability**

The average weight at each sampling period, under all storage conditions, showed no trends in weight loss or gain, demonstrating no significant moisture sorption or desorption.
A slight decrease in tablet hardness was noted after one week of storage under ‘control conditions’. However, all tablets disintegrated in less than 30 seconds, with no discernable trends of increased or decreased disintegration time after an initial slight decrease after one week of storage under all conditions. No significant difference was seen in the disintegration profiles of the tablets stored under all storage conditions, with the API in solution remaining above 80% after 45 minutes for all tablets. The quality of frusemide tablets was confirmed regarding their disintegration, hardness, weight uniformity, friability, and dissolution rate over a period of 8 weeks (Table 1).

Table 1. Physical stability of frusemide tablets after 8 weeks of storage under various environmental conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical test</th>
<th>Requirement</th>
<th>Storage</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Friability</td>
<td>Max loss of 1% of the</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tablets mass is acceptable</td>
<td>In-use (a)</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In-use (b)</td>
<td>0.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disintegration</td>
<td>All tablets disintegrated after</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>19 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15 min</td>
<td>In-use (a)</td>
<td>18 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In-use (b)</td>
<td>20 sec</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dissolution</td>
<td>Amount of active ingredient in</td>
<td>Control</td>
<td>100.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>solution after 45 min is not less</td>
<td>In-use (a)</td>
<td>94.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>than 70%</td>
<td>In-use (b)</td>
<td>94.48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were noticeable organoleptic changes in the tablets stored under ‘pharmacy conditions’ with a progressive yellow discolouration over the 8 weeks, starting in week 1. The frusemide tablets stored under ‘control conditions’ and ‘home conditions’ did not change from their original, pure white color.

DISCUSSION

A recent study examined the stability implications of repackaging paracetamol tablets in a commonly used DAA.13 The samples in a recent study examined the stability implications of repackaging a drug product susceptible to photodegradation into a commonly used DAA over a conventional packaging and in-use period of 8 weeks. Storage conditions were therefore chosen to reflect those typically encountered in patients’ homes (home conditions) and in a pharmacy offering a repackaging service (pharmacy conditions).

Although the physical and chemical stability of frusemide was confirmed under all conditions, the tablets stored under ‘pharmacy conditions’ displayed a progressive yellow discolouration over a period of 8 weeks (starting in week 1). These tablets were exposed to fluorescent lighting which emits more UV light than the standard tungsten bulb encountered in the ‘home conditions’. The effect of light was confirmed by the results for the photostability studies conducted according to the ICH guidelines. Although the colour change was noted as having negligible effects on frusemide content (possibly due to it being a surface effect) and physicochemical parameters of the tablets, it should be considered an unacceptable change, since patients are likely to be concerned about a possible compromise in the quality of the medication, and this may have an effect on patient acceptance and hence compliance.

These results indicate that frusemide tablets repackaged into DAAs should be protected from light in the pharmacy and in patients’ homes. This can be achieved by placing the DAA into a light-protecting sleeve (e.g. foil, cardboard) and/or stored protected from light. A recent study made further practical recommendations for patients that include:13

- careful removal of tablets to prevent accidental rupture of adjacent blisters, thus exposing tablets to air and moisture;
- monitoring DAA integrity throughout the in-use period; and
- consideration of an appropriate location to store the DAA to avoid unnecessary exposure to light, heat and humidity.

In conclusion, because of the discolouration of frusemide tablets after one week, DAAs should be protected from light immediately after repackaging and patients should be advised to store DAAs in a cool dark place. The results of this study provide further evidence to support pharmacists in making positive decisions regarding the repackaging of medicines in these devices.

Competing interests: None declared.

References

Pamela Elizabeth Nieman
16 June 1950—18 July 2007

Pam Nieman was an extraordinary woman who devoted her life to her family, her profession, community work and her friends. Pam made an enormous contribution to the profession up until her death on 18 July 2007. Pam was diagnosed with motor neurone disease in November 2006 and, with the absolute and indefatigable spirit. She will be truly missed but fondly remembered for all, and her passionate drive for best practice, ethic and always stood up for what she felt was right. She believed applied to all aspects of her life. Pam had a remarkable work ethic and always stood up for what she felt was right. She believed in a fair go for all, and her passionate drive for best practice, social equity and professional progress exemplified her career.

Pam’s long and illustrious association with hospital pharmacy began in 1970 when she worked as a student at Peter MacCallum Cancer Institute. In 1971 she completed her traineeship at St Vincent’s Hospital and in 1972 moved to The Royal Melbourne Hospital (RMH) to work under the directorship of Neil Naismith. Neil clearly recognised Pam’s potential and she became one of the first clinical pharmacists in Victoria. Pam stayed at RMH for over 25 years, where she was valued and respected as a friend and mentor to many pharmacists, technicians and other members of staff.

In 1997 Pam became the Executive Officer of SHPA, the first pharmacist appointed to this role. In 2000, she left SHPA to care for her father, but continued working part-time at the Royal Children’s Hospital and then at Monash Medical Centre.


For her enormous contribution to the profession, Pam was awarded two prestigious awards available to SHPA members—Glaxo Medal of Merit (1990) and Fred J Boyd Award (1995). In 1996, Pam was elevated to the status of Fellow (Honoris Causa) by PSA, for her contribution to the whole profession.

Pam also worked hard in the community and over the past five years she worked with a team from local churches in Richmond to provide food for the needy. She was a keen race goer, had a wry sense of humour and enjoyed good food, good wine and good conversation. Pam was generous and considerate and always ready to lend a hand of friendship or support, or to offer condolences or congratulations as the occasion required. This seems to have been the ‘Nieman way’ and Pam certainly carried on the proud family tradition.

The world will be a poorer place without Pam’s unselfish and indefatigable spirit. She will be truly missed but fondly remembered with admiration and respect.

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