

Qutenza

A new treatment for localised chronic neuropathic pain

Key points

Importance and diagnosis of neuropathic pain

Localised neuropathic pain

Topical treatments

Chronic pain management is challenging and the treatment of neuropathic pain is perhaps the most challenging of all. Defined as pain secondary to changes in the nervous system (1) it includes conditions such as post-herpetic neuralgia, diabetic neuropathy and post surgery scar pains.

Current pharmacological treatment of neuropathic pain is with anti-depressants and anti-convulsants with opioids as a third line option. (Nice 2010). However as with all drug management in chronic pain efficacy may be limited and drug side-effects may preclude long-term use. Thus a topical treatment for localised neuropathic pain could add considerably to the management of neuropathic pain.

Qutenza is a cutaneous patch containing 8% w/w capsaicin, an active ingredient found in chilli peppers. Capsaicin functions by reversibly desensitising nociceptors to inhibit the transmission of pain signals. Capsaicin cream is currently available but the strength is 1%. Qutenza delivers a therapeutic dose of capsaicin in a single 30 minute (for the feet) or 60 minute application (for the rest of the body). The reduction in pain begins in the first week after treatment and lasts at least 12 weeks.(2)

Qutenza is licensed for the treatment of peripheral neuropathic pain in non-diabetic adults, and indicated for conditions such as postherpetic neuralgia (PHN), HIV-associated neuropathies (HIV-AN) and pain following surgery or related to cancer.

The cutaneous patch is well-tolerated and has a favourable safety profile compared to current first line agents for the management of peripheral neuropathic pain. However it requires administration by specialist clinics as topical anaesthesia is required prior to application.

1. National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. Neuropathic pain: The pharmacological management of neuropathic pain in adults in non-specialist settings. *NICE clinical guideline* March 2010.

2. Astellas Pharma. Qutenza: Summary of product characteristics. 2009.