Severity of Xerostomia Reduced When Salagen Tablets Taken During Radiation Therapy

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A study presented at the annual meeting of the American Society for Therapeutic Radiology and Oncology (ASTRO) found that taking Salagen tablets (pilocarpine hydrochloride) during radiation therapy reduces the symptoms of xerostomia more effectively than taking the drug after radiation therapy is completed.

According to lead author Robert P. Zimmerman, MD, UCLA Department of Radiation Oncology, Los Angeles, the study compared the severity of xerostomia endured by head and neck cancer patients when Salagen was administered during therapy, after therapy, and not at all. The study involved a total of 29 cancer patients: 17 who received Salagen during radiation therapy and 12 who did not take the drug during therapy. After radiation therapy was completed, the 12 nontreated patients were placed on Salagen for 1 month and were again compared with those who received Salagen concurrently with radiation therapy.

The 17 patients who began taking Salagen Tablets concurrently with radiation therapy suffered significantly less from oral dryness and discomfort and encountered markedly less difficulty sleeping, speaking, and eating. The most severe xerostomia was seen in post-radiation patients who had not yet received Salagen Tablets.

The results of this study concur with those of another study presented in May 1996 at the annual meeting of the American Society of Clinical Oncology by Francis G. LeVeque, DDS, Chief of Oral Medicine and Oncology at DMC Harper Hospital, Detroit. Dr. Leveque's study of 16 patients showed that using Salagen Tablets concurrently with radiation therapy significantly reduced oral dryness and pain and decreased the incidence of oral mucositis by 60%.

Radiation therapy used to treat tumors of the head and neck damages the salivary glands, reducing their ability to produce saliva. Research shows that a decrease in salivary flow typically begins as early as the first week of radiation therapy. The resultant dry mouth predisposes patients to a multitude of oral complications, including mucositis, oral infections, and tooth decay. In addition, patients who suffer from this condition can have difficulty speaking, eating, and swallowing.

Salagen Tablets are the only prescription pharmaceutical indicated for the treatment of symptoms of radiation-induced xerostomia in the United States. Salagen works by stimulating moisture-producing glands in the body, including the salivary and tear glands.

Health-care providers and patients who need information about managing dry mouth can call the Salagen Tablets/Dry Mouth Information Hotline at 1-800-644-4811, Monday through Friday, 9 am to 8 pm EST. Registered pharmacists are available to answer questions about how to manage problems associated with dry mouth and the use of Salagen Tablets. In addition, they can provide educational materials for dry mouth sufferers.

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