The Cost of Vehicle Choice: Assessing the Out-of-Pocket Price of Topical Prescriptions by Formulation

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Introduction

Vehicle type and cost influence adherence to topical medications. Several vehicles have been shown to be preferable, however, there are limited studies that evaluated cost differences between more preferred and other vehicle options.

Objective

To compare costs between vehicle types, specifically more preferred versus less preferred vehicle types.

Methods

We calculated the out-of-pocket cost per metric unit for all topical prescription claims in 2018 by retrospectively analyzing the IBM MarketScan database. Secondly, all claims for clobetasol 0.05%, a commonly prescribed topical medication available in a wide variety of vehicles, were analyzed to compare vehicle prices. Patient preference for vehicles was based on a review of the literature. The more preferred group of vehicles included lotion, foam, spray, gel, and solution, while the less preferred group included cream, oil, and ointment.

Results

Preferred vehicles consisted of 29% of all topical prescriptions and 34% of clobetasol 0.05% prescriptions in 2018. Among all topicals, the mean out-of-pocket cost per unit was 2.63 times more expensive for the more preferred vehicles group than the less preferred group. Among clobetasol 0.05% claims, the more preferred vehicles were 1.28 times less expensive than the less preferred group.

Discussion

Among all topical prescriptions, the more preferred vehicles were on average more expensive than the less preferred formulations. However, when just clobetasol prescriptions were examined, the more preferred vehicles had a lower mean cost per unit. Although on average preferred vehicles are more expensive and less prescribed, this study provides evidence that this is not generalizable amongst individual medications.

Conclusions

Selecting an appropriate topical vehicle should be an individualized decision that considers patient preference and financial burden. More cost transparency between prescriptions is needed to ensure that the best vehicle, including the one that the patient is most willing to pay for, is being prescribed for each patient.

References