Compliance to antifracture treatments in Tuscany: a regional survey based on institutional pharmaceutical dataset

Prisco Piscitelli¹
Gemma Marcucci¹
Simone Parri¹
Loredana Cavalli¹
Emanuela Colli¹
Luciana Pazzagli²
Paolo Batacchi²
Teresa Brocca²
Valtere Giovannini²
Maria Luisa Brandi¹

¹ Department of Internal Medicine, University of Florence, Florence, Italy
² Careggi University Hospital, AOUC, Florence, Italy
³ Local Health Authority, ASF, Florence, Italy

Address for correspondence:
Prisco Piscitelli
University of Florence
Largo Palagi 1
50139 Florence, Italy
Phone/Fax: +39 055 7946303
E-mail: prisco.piscitelli@tiscali.it

Summary

Objective: compliance to any antifracture therapy is the most important parameter affecting the effectiveness of the treatment. The aim of this study was to evaluate patients compliance to antifracture therapies in the whole Tuscany population who benefit from treatments reimbursed by the Regional Healthcare System.

Methods: we have analyzed all antifracture drug prescriptions recorded in Tuscany regional pharmaceutical database concerning year 2009, from both in-hospital distribution database (direct drug delivery, FED), and private pharmacies across the whole region (SPF). Patients who started the treatment in 2008 and those continuing it in 2010 were also considered in the analysis. The sample size consisted in 92,250 people (1:9 male to female ratio). We have included anonymous data from both in-hospital distribution database (direct drug delivery, FED), and private pharmacies across the whole region (SPF). The analysis was carried out by referring to defined daily dose (DDD) for each drug. In computing patients compliance to therapies, we have considered all patients who were assuming any antifracture drug for at least one year.

Results: patients compliance decreased under 80% after the first 3 months of treatment, reaching no more than 50% at 1 year. Our results show that compliance to antifracture treatments reflects the age of the patients. People aged 70-80 years old represent the age group most frequently treated with antifracture therapies (36.57% of total prescriptions), with alendronic acid being the most prescribed drug (29.73% of total drug prescribed). Monthly dosing did not increase compliance if compared to oral weekly regimens, while daily oral or s.c. dosing were associated to lower compliance rates.

Conclusion: serious efforts need to be implemented to foster patients motivation in assuming their antifracture treatments for at least one year.

KEY WORDS: antifracture drugs; compliance; efficacy; institutional database.

Introduction

Osteoporosis is a chronic systemic skeletal disorder characterized by low bone density and micro-architectural deterioration resulting in increased susceptibility to fragility fractures (1). Therapeutic options currently available for osteoporosis prevention and treatment include different antiresorptive and anabolic drugs. Adherence to antifracture therapy is the most important parameter affecting the effectiveness of treatments. The primary challenge in treating osteoporosis is that many patients do not take their antifracture therapies correctly. Approximately 50% of all patients do not take bisphosphonates regularly (2) or continue with treatment for at least 12 months (3), with many people discontinuing drug assumption immediately after initiation (4). The suboptimal compliance to oral bisphosphonates may result in negative consequences such as an increased fracture risk (5). Poor compliance to oral medications seems not to be caused by forgetfulness, but to deliberate choice. However, it is very difficult to find out information or studies addressing the issue of patients compliance to antifracture drugs. The aim of this survey was to evaluate patients compliance to antifracture therapies approved for post-menopausal and male osteoporosis in the whole Tuscany population who benefit from treatments reimbursed by Tuscany Regional Healthcare System by analyzing institutional dataset.

Methods

We analyzed all antifracture drug prescriptions anonymously recorded in Tuscany regional pharmaceutical database. The sample size consisted in 92,250 people (males: 9,447; 10.24% - females: 82,803; 89.76%). We have included anonymous data from both in-hospital distribution database (direct drug delivery, FED), and private pharmacies across the whole region (SPF). The analysis was carried out by referring to defined daily dose (DDD) for each drug. In computing patients compliance to therapies, we have considered all patients who were assuming any antifracture drug in year 2009. Patients who had started their antifracture treatment in 2008 and were continuing the therapy in 2009 were also included, as well as those who started the treatment in 2009 and continued drug assumption during the subsequent year 2010. Interruptions of the therapy, such as patients discontinuing the treatment during summertime, were not considered in computing the compliance. Patients compliance to antifracture treatments at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months was analyzed by single drug, and by age group (40-50, 50-60, 60-70, 70-80, 90-100 years).
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Results

As shown in Table 1 and represented in Figure 1, the most frequently prescribed treatment was alendronate (29.73% of total DDDs), followed by risedronate (21.89%), alendronate plus vitamin D (16.06%), strontium ranelate (15.08%), ibandronate (8.69%), neridronate (4.19%), teripartride (1.52%), zoledronate (1.32%), raloxifene (0.78%), clodronic acid (0.44%), parathyroid hormone (0.20%), and etidronic acid (0.09%). As reported in the subsequent tables, among patients receiving prescription of any antifracture therapy, the most represented age groups were the following: 70-80 years (36.57% of total DDDs), 80-90 years (22.95%), 50-60 years (13.04%), 60-70 years (11.79%), and 40-50 years (10.6%). Weekly dosing was the regimen most frequently used both for alendronate and risedronate. Some differences in the weight of each drug among the different age groups were found: monthly ibandronate represented 10-11% of total DDDs in people aged 40 to 70, and 6-8% in older age groups; alendronate (alone) accounted for 25% of total DDDs in people aged 40 to 70 and for 30-35% in patients aged 70 or older; zoledronate was prescribed mostly in younger people (4% of total DDDs in patients aged 40-50 years old), while daily s.c. anabolic drugs were most frequently assumed by older patients (about 2% of total DDDs between 70 and 90 years old). Risedronate and strontium ranelate accounted for about 21% and 16% of total DDDs in all age groups, respectively. When looking at the three most represented age groups of patients (from 60 to 80 years old), the compliance to the most frequently prescribed bisphosphonates (alendronate, risedronate, alendronate + vitamin D, and ibandronate) were similar at 3, 6, 9, and 12 months (Tables 2 to 5). It must be pointed out that alendronate + vitamin D showed lower compliance rates than alendronate alone, possibly reflecting discrepancies in the reimbursement of this drug by the regional healthcare system. Remarkably, monthly dosing (ibandronate) did not increase compliance if compared to oral weekly regimens, while daily oral or s.c. dosing were associated to lower compliance (Tables 2 to 5). Specifically people aged 70-80 years represented the most compliant age group to alendronate therapy, while the lowest compliance was observed in between 40 and 50 years old. This trend was confirmed at 3, 6, 9 and 12 months (Tables 2 to 5). Over the time, all age groups showed a decrease in compliance to therapy. After nine months, 65.4% of patients between 70 and 80 years old were still taking alendronate (compliance at 1 year: 56.1%), while only 50.7% of patients between 40 and 50 years old were still compliant at 9 months. Similarly, after nine months, 65.9% of patients aged 70-80 who were assuming risedronate (compliance...
at 1 year: 57.6%) were still taking the drug vs. 48.48% of patients aged 40-50. The 9 months compliance with alendronate + vitamin D (colecalciferol) in patients aged 70-80 years old was only 59.4% (compliance at 1 year: 51.8%). In the same age group, 9 months compliance to monthly ibandronate was 63.42% (compliance at 1 year: 54.3%). Compliance to strontium ranelate (administered orally every day, did not exceed 38% at 9 months and 28% at 1 year. Six months compliance to daily s.c. teriparatide and parathyroid hormone did not exceed 66% and 69%, respectively.

**Discussion**

This is the first study addressing the issue of patients compliance to antifracture therapies in a entire Italian region. The findings of our analyses are quite impressive as only during the first 3 months of treatment there is evidence of a compliance $\geq 80\%$, which has been set as a value already corresponding to a reduction of 50% in drug antifracture efficacy (5). This data is of particular concern, as the current knowledge indicates that compliance rates $<80\%$
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Table 5 - One year compliance to antifracture therapies reimbursed by Tuscany Healthcare System.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>% DDDs per age group over total DDDs</th>
<th>Alendronate</th>
<th>Risedronate</th>
<th>Alendronate + colecalciferol</th>
<th>Strontium ranelate</th>
<th>Ibandronate</th>
<th>Nandronate</th>
<th>Teriparadine</th>
<th>Zoledronate</th>
<th>Raloxifene</th>
<th>Parathyroid Hormone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40/50</td>
<td>1,591</td>
<td>1.70%</td>
<td>41.20%</td>
<td>40.55%</td>
<td>20.73%</td>
<td>35.68%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>35.71%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50/60</td>
<td>12,206</td>
<td>13.04%</td>
<td>46.03%</td>
<td>52.26%</td>
<td>44.96%</td>
<td>27.64%</td>
<td>15.05%</td>
<td>35.48%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>51.79%</td>
<td>22.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60/70</td>
<td>21,462</td>
<td>22.85%</td>
<td>52.64%</td>
<td>51.34%</td>
<td>52.82%</td>
<td>54.83%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>37.64%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>56.11%</td>
<td>35.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70/80</td>
<td>34,240</td>
<td>35.70%</td>
<td>54.17%</td>
<td>57.21%</td>
<td>51.79%</td>
<td>24.23%</td>
<td>54.34%</td>
<td>35.91%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>49.79%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80/90</td>
<td>22,442</td>
<td>23.97%</td>
<td>53.06%</td>
<td>54.02%</td>
<td>48.92%</td>
<td>22.07%</td>
<td>50.06%</td>
<td>35.96%</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
<td>51.66%</td>
<td>39.53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90/100</td>
<td>1,668</td>
<td>1.78%</td>
<td>44.86%</td>
<td>40.03%</td>
<td>40.85%</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
<td>35.58%</td>
<td>20.67%</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>57.14%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Remarkably reduce the drug efficacy in terms of fracture prevention, with protective effects being almost lost in case of compliance <50%. However, it is clear that some effects may not be excluded even after 6 months of therapy both for antiresorptive and anabolic treatments. Our results also show that adherence to the treatment reflect the age of the patients. The worst compliance rates were generally observed in the youngest (40-50) and oldest (90-100) age groups. Despite these subgroups represented a small percentage of treated patients (about 1.7%), the observed effect may reflect difficulties in getting a reimbursed therapy from the regional healthcare system. This could also explain why the compliance to alendronate + vitamin D (which is still a branded drug) is currently lower than adherence to therapy with alendronate alone. Gender differences and other variables such as the organization of healthcare system may also play a role. Moreover epidemiological studies have shown that adverse upper gastrointestinal effects, more frequent dosing, treatment cost, lack of disease symptoms, and practical difficulties in the administration regimen are independent predictors of poor adherence to bisphosphonate therapy. Silverman et al. suggest that psycho-behavioral interventions may help to improve motivation. It is important to understand the reasons for poor compliance, and patient preferences must be considered in medication decision making. Siris et al. have reported a linear association between adherence with osteoporosis medications and incidence of fractures during a 2-year treatment period. Increasing refill compliance levels are associated with progressively lower fracture rates. These findings suggest that incremental changes in medication-taking habits could improve clinical outcomes of osteoporosis treatment. Curtis et al. showed a similar linear effect by evaluating adherence in a time varying manner over 2.5 years. Sampalis et al. confirms that the adherence with osteoporosis treatment in patients with osteoporosis is suboptimal and that it decreases at significant rates with longer treatment duration, increasing risk of osteoporotic fractures. This type of information may be more relevant for daily clinical practice because it provides an assessment of the benefits of medications across the range of possible adherence rates. However, it is clear that physicians play an important role fostering motivation of the patients to assume the therapy for the whole period indicated in their prescriptions.

Conclusion

Our data show that patients compliance to any antifracture therapy in Tuscany decreased under 80% immediately after the first 3 months of treatment, and up to 50-55% at one year. This data is of particular concern; as the current evidences have showed that compliance rates <80% remarkably reduce the drug efficacy in terms of fracture prevention, with protective effects being almost lost in case of compliance <50%. Major efforts should be performed in motivating patients to continue assuming their antifracture therapy for the entire period indicated in medical prescription.

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References