EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Tablident

Because of the difficulty in identifying tablets or capsules, various identification systems have been developed using colour charts, trays of specimens, records of tablet imprints, etc. Recently, a new solid dose identification system called Tablident has been marketed and claims to be able to identify most tablets and capsules, including many unmarked white tablets. Tablident's system consists of a plastic three-dimensional 'V' which enables the user to express the physical characteristics of the solid dose in a 19-digit code. This code, together with details of any markings, the proprietary name, the ingredients, and manufacturer's name, is available in a computerized print-out of the data base. An unknown drug is identified by deriving the identification code with the help of the plastic 'V' and locating it in the print-out. The data base contains details of 3087 products, but the number of codes exceeds this by 50% because some products have size variations which produce more than one code.

The system was tested by a group against the three best-known identification systems available in Britain: the MIMS colour index 83, published by Medical Publications Ltd, 76 Dean Street, London W1A 1BU; the IMPREX index of imprints on tablets and capsules 9th edition by W. A. L. Collier, published at Lower Clapton Health Centre, London E5; and the Chemist and Druggist Directory 1983, published by Benn Business Information Services Ltd, Union House, Eridge Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN4 8HF.

IMPREX was found to be the fastest method to use. Tablident was slower at an average time of 2 minutes and 13 seconds. The Chemist and Druggist Directory was very difficult to use and extremely slow.

The MIMS colour index was the easiest to use. It needed relatively little explanation or training. The IMPREX index of imprints took some time to get used to, but was easy to use after the volunteer had learned simple ground rules. Tablident was voted as about as easy to use as the IMPREX index of imprints. The Chemist and Druggist Directory was so difficult to use that most volunteers said they would not use it in a busy accident and emergency unit.

Tablident was undoubtedly the most comprehensive of the four systems. Ten out of 15 volunteers could identify all 26 products. Five volunteers were unsuccessful in identifying one unmarked white tablet. MIMS colour index could identify 11 of 14 marked products, and three of 12 unmarked products. The IMPREX index of imprints was able to identify only 10 of the 14 marked products with any degree of consistency. The Chemist and Druggist Directory was very difficult to use, but by my estimation would have identified 18 of the 26 products, although with very great difficulty. Very few volunteers persisted in obtaining answers with the Chemist and Druggist Directory.

In addition, using Tablident, 213 different tablets and capsules brought by patients to the accident and emergency department were successfully identified. Tablident is now used in the department three to four times a week.

Identifying unmarked tablets and capsules has been a long-standing problem in accident and emergency departments. Whitney (1980), Collier (1964) and Robertson (1974) have campaigned for all solid medication to carry an imprinted code, and up to July 1981 11 states in the USA had adopted legislation to make imprints on tablets and capsules mandatory.

The Tablident system is a significant advance in identification of tablets and capsules, because of its ability to identify many unmarked white tablets. It will be a very useful tool in all accident and emergency departments as it requires only a few minutes of training and can be used by most untrained persons by following the instructions.

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