In vitro quality evaluation of metformin hydrochloride tablets marketed in Addis Ababa

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Abstract

In this study, an attempt was made to assess quality as well as pharmaceutical equivalence of six brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets marketed in Addis Ababa using \textit{in vitro} methods. Friability, disintegration, dissolution and assay for the content of active ingredients were evaluated using the methods described in the United States pharmacopeia (2007). All the brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets complied with the official specification for hardness, friability, disintegration and assay. Five brands of metformin hydrochloride complied with the USP dissolution tolerance limits but Metformin Denk failed to release the stated amount. Statistical comparison for \textit{in vitro} drug release indicates that some of the products of metformin hydrochloride tablets showed significant difference (P<0.05), indicating difference in their \textit{in vitro} drug release that might affect the \textit{in vivo} bioavailability and the bioequivalence of the products.

Key words: Metformin hydrochloride; Physicochemical bioequivalence; Drug release; Drug quality

Introduction

Diabetes mellitus (DM) is a group of metabolic disorders characterized by hyperglycemia, altered metabolism of carbohydrates, fats and proteins with an increased risk of complication of vascular diseases. It results from defects in insulin secretion, insulin sensitivity, or both (Barbara \textit{et al}., 2009). The increasing prevalence of DM in the world and also in developing countries, the emergence of diabetes complications as a cause of early morbidity and mortality and the enormous and mounting burden on health care systems make diabetes a priority health concern (Khatib, 2006). Long-term complications of diabetes include retinopathy, nephropathy, peripheral neuropathy, amputations and sexual dysfunction (Bastaki, 2005).

Pharmaceuticals are used primarily to save life and to prevent long-term diabetic complications. There has been a global increase in the prevalence of Type 2 DM due to life style changes such as poor diet, decreased physical activity and stress (Wild \textit{et al}., 2004). This type of DM requires the use of oral hypoglycemic agents when dietary control and exercise have proved inadequate (Katzung \textit{et al}., 2012). Oral hypoglycemic agents include biguanides (metformin), sulphonylureas (tolbutamide, glibenclamide) and thiazolidinediones (glitazones) (Bastaki, 2005).

Metformin belongs to the biguanide class of oral hypoglycemic agents and is a widely used antidiabetic drug for the management of type II DM (Sahra \textit{et al}., 2010). Chemically it is N,N-dimethyl imidodicarbonimidic diamide hydrochloride (C\textsubscript{4}H\textsubscript{11}N\textsubscript{5}H\textsubscript{Cl}) with a molecular weight of 165.6 (Najib \textit{et al}., 2002). Metformin hydrochloride decreases intestinal absorption of glucose, suppresses glucose production, especially hepatic gluconeogenesis and improves peripheral tissue insulin sensitivity by increasing peripheral glucose uptake and utilization (Poretsky, 2010).

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Many generics of metformin hydrochloride tablets are available within the drug supply system globally after the expiration of patent on the innovator brand. Different reports on comparative in vitro quality evaluation of generics of metformin hydrochloride tablets of different countries have been published. Olusola et al. (2012) evaluated eight brands of metformin hydrochloride 500 mg tablets available in Lagos, Nigeria and showed that only four brands could be regarded as being biopharmaceutically and chemically equivalent. In addition, Zakeri-Milani et al. (2012) evaluated eight generic metformin hydrochloride tablets which are available in Iran market and reported that all except one generic product were bioequivalent with the innovator brand. Moreover, Bhavanam et al. (2010) evaluated four brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets available in India and found out that all the products met the requirements as per general specifications of Indian Pharmacopoeia. Preliminary physicochemical assessment of drug products has a paramount importance in ensuring the quality of drug products. Generic drug products must satisfy the same standards of bioavailability or bioequivalence studies which may involve both in vivo and in vitro studies (Chereson, 1996). Assessment of bioequivalence of the different generic products available in the market is very important to ensure that generic drugs being sold can be used interchangeably with the branded products (Fahmy and Gharbieh, 2014).

### Materials and methods

#### Materials and reagents

The chemicals and reagents used to perform the experiments were the following: 500 mg metformin hydrochloride tablets, monobasic ammonium phosphate (FARMITALIA CAROERBA, Italy), sodium hydroxide (BDH limited, Poole, England), potassium phosphate monobasic (Fisher Scientific, USA), and distilled water. Different brands of 500 mg metformin hydrochloride tablets were bought from various pharmacy retail outlets in Addis Ababa. All the brands used were within their shelf life at the time of study. The detailed descriptions of these products are presented in Table I. Standard metformin hydrochloride was obtained from EFMHACA and is of USP reference standard. All chemicals used were analytical grade.

#### Equipment

The following equipment were used for the experiment: analytical balance (Mettler Toledo, Switzerland), hardness tester (Schleuniger, 2E/205, Switzerland), friability tester.

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Table I. Product description of metformin hydrochloride tablets

| Brand           | Manufacturer                          | Batch Number | Mfg. date | Exp. date |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Bigomet         | ARISTO Pharmaceuticals Pvt. Ltd., (India) | M101E011E    | 05/2011   | 04/2014   |
| Brot            | Medscheme Ltd., (Cyprus)               | A6F099       | 06/2012   | 06/2017   |
| Diabetamin      | HOVID Bhd., (Malaysia)                 | BB08422      | 08/2011   | 08/2014   |
| Glucomet        | Y.S.P Industries SDN. BHD., (Malaysia) | VJ012        | 10/2011   | 10/2014   |
| Metformin Denk  | DENK PHARMA GMBH & CO.KG., (Germany)   | 80B          | 02/2013   | 01/2018   |
| Neomid          | AEGIS LTD., (Cyprus)                   | 12176        | 08/2011   | 07/2014   |

The introduction of generic drug product from multiple sources into the health care delivery system of many developing countries has been accompanied by a variety of problems of which the most critical is the widespread distribution of fake and substandard drug products (Bano et al., 2011). The increasing use of metformin hydrochloride tablets in clinical practice creates the need to monitor and ascertain the quality of the various brands available in the drug market for quality control assessment and for purpose of
(ERWEKA, TAR 20, Germany), disintegration apparatus (CALEVA, G.B. Caleva Ltd., UK), dissolution apparatus (ERWEKA, DT600, Germany), UV-Visible Spectrophotometer (Single beam Spectrophotometer, CM2203, Belarus), filter paper (diameter 110, lot ER0692-1, Schleicher and Schuell, Germany) and PH meter (Mettler Toledo, Switzerland).

Methods

Drug quality assessment experiment was done using pharmacopeial procedures described in the USP/NF XXIV, USP (USP/NF 25, 2007).

Hardness test

The hardness of each tablet was determined by selecting six tablets randomly using a hardness tester. Each tablet was placed between two anvils and force was applied to the anvils, and the crushing strength that causes the tablet to break was recorded. Crushing strength of average of six tablets was recorded.

Uniformity of dosage units

The dosage uniformity of metformin hydrochloride tablets was evaluated by weight variation, where twenty tablets from each of the six brands were selected by chance, weighed individually with an analytical balance. The average weights for each brand as well as the percentage deviation from the mean value were calculated.

Friability test

Ten tablets from each brand was dedusted and weighed on the analytical balance. Tablets were placed in the drum of the friability tester rotated at 25 revolutions per minute (rpm) for four minutes (100 times). Then, tablets were weighed and were compared with their initial weights and percentage friability was calculated.

Disintegration time

Six tablets were placed in a disintegration tester filled with distilled water at 37±0.5°C. The tablets were considered completely disintegrated when all the particles are passed through the wire mesh and time was recorded.

Chemical assay

Assay of metformin hydrochloride is carried out according to USP/NF (2007) specification. Standard preparation: metformin hydrochloride standard was dissolved in distilled water to obtain 0.01 mg/ml concentration of the standard solution. From the stock solution, serial dilutions were made to obtain calibration concentrations of 0.007 mg/ml, 0.008 mg/ml, 0.009 mg/ml, 0.01 mg/ml and 0.012 mg/ml.

Sample preparation: twenty tablets of each brand were crushed separately and finely powdered. An accurately weighed portion of the powder was transferred, equivalent to about 100 mg of metformin hydrochloride, to a 100 ml volumetric flask. Water (70 ml) was added, shaken by mechanical means for 15 min, diluted with water to volume, and filtered, discarding the first 20 ml of the filtrate. The filtrate (10 ml) was diluted with water to 100 ml and 10 ml of the resulting solution was further diluted with water to 100 ml to obtain 0.01 mg/ml sample solution. The active pharmaceutical ingredient content of sample solutions was determined by measuring their absorbance against the reagent blank at 232 nm using an Ultraviolet (UV) visible Spectrophotometer.

Dissolution test

The dissolution of metformin hydrochloride was done using dissolution apparatus type II (paddle apparatus) with the rate of 50 rpm at 37±0.5°C on six tablets of each brand. The dissolution medium was 900 ml phosphate buffer (pH=6.8). 10 ml sample was withdrawn at 10, 20, 30, 45, and 60 min and an equivalent amount of fresh dissolution medium, maintained at equal temperature, was replaced. Filtered samples were then appropriately diluted (100 fold dilutions) and absorbance readings were taken with UV/Visible Spectrophotometer at wavelength of 232 nm. Solutions of metformin working standard was also prepared using dissolution medium and absorbance was measured. Phosphate buffer was used as a blank. The concentration of each sample was determined from calibration curve and the percent of drug release at each time was calculated.

Data analysis

Data obtained was treated using ORIGIN® graphing and scientific analysis software program, Microsoft Excel 2007 and Windows SPSS Version 20. Comparison and statistical significance was determined by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA). All data were analyzed at a 95% confidence interval (P < 0.05).

Results and discussion

Uniformity of dosage forms

The result of weight uniformity test is shown in Table II. All the brands complied with the USP (2007) specification for uniformity of weight as none had percentage deviation in weight greater than 5%.
Table II. Weight variation of different brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets

| Products       | Met. Denk   | Brot     | Neomid   | Bigomet   | Gluomet   | Diabetamin |
|----------------|-------------|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Weight (mg±SD) | 668.76±6.0  | 680.92±4.8 | 599.05±4.1 | 687.32±7.5 | 561.88±4.5 | 564.1±12.3 |
| % Deviation (Range) | (-1.07, 1.53) | (-1.03, 1.3) | (-1.48, 0.81) | (-1.66, 1.71) | (-1.26, 1.21) | (-3.81, 4.04) |
| % RSD         | 0.90        | 0.71      | 0.68      | 1.09      | 0.80      | 2.18       |

Weight uniformity test is required to ensure that the drug content in each unit dose is distributed in a narrow range around the label strength (USP, 2007). Uniformity of weight serves as a pointer to good manufacturing practices as well as amount of the API contained in the formulation (Oishi et al., 2011) and it is an important parameter because high weight variation indicates variation in amount of active ingredients and/or chemical additives. Variation of active ingredients may lead to toxicity, ineffectiveness or unpredictability of action of the product while variability of additives may affect other physicochemical characteristics of the product and ultimately alter the bioavailability of the drug (Ogah and Kadejo, 2013).

**Hardness and friability test**

The mean hardness values of metformin hydrochloride tablets are shown in Table III. The results showed that the brands had mean hardness value within the range of 156.5±7.86-199.5±0.836 N for metformin hydrochloride tablets. For metformin hydrochloride tablets studied, Bigomet had the highest hardness value (199.5±0.836 N) while Neomid had the lowest value (156.5±7.86 N).

A force of about 40 N is the minimum requirement for satisfactory tablet hardness (Oishi et al., 2011). Hence, the tablets of all brands of metformin hydrochloride were satisfactory for hardness. Similarly, the weight loss of the tablets after friability test expressed as percent friability is indicated in Table III. The lowest and highest percent friability for metformin hydrochloride tablets has been obtained for Bigomet (0.036) and Neomid (0.127), respectively.

The USP (2007) states that the friability value of tablets should be less than 1% and the results showed that all the brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets had friability values ranging from 0.036-0.1 27% and thus, all brands passed the friability specification. Brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets with higher crushing strength showed low friability value. Generally, all the studied metformin hydrochloride tablets passed hardness and friability test.

Hardness or crushing strength of tablets is an important parameter which helps to assess the resistance of the tablet to breakage under condition of storage, transportation and handling (Odeniyi et al., 2003; Bano et al., 2011). Therefore, it can influence friability, disintegration and dissolution. Excessive hardness of tablets would prolong disintegration time, thereby affecting dissolution and absorption rates, bioavailability and onset of action of the drug. Soft tablets, on the other hand, are unable to withstand conditions of storage, transportation and handling without breaking or chipping. It is, therefore, important that tablets are of optimum hardness. Factors affecting the strength of tablets include the amount of binders used in granulation and the pressure applied during compression of the tablets (Oishi et al., 2011; Ogah and Kadejo, 2013). Friability test is closely related to tablet hardness and is designed to evaluate the ability of the tablet to withstand abrasion in coating, packaging, handling and transporting and other manufacturing processes (Kishore and Amareshwvar, 2012). Generally, adequate tablet hardness as well as reasonable friability is required for consumer acceptance (Hailu et al., 2011).

**Disintegration test**

The mean disintegration times of the different brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets are shown in Table IV. The results showed that all the brands passed the disintegration test according to USP (2007), which specifies 30 min for uncoated and film coated tablets.

As shown in Table IV, the disintegration times for metformin hydrochloride tablets had fallen within the acceptable range. Brot (6.44±1.64) and Diabetamin (6.17±0.86) with low values are possibly attributed to the presence of large amounts of disintegrants (Muaz et al., 2009). These, coupled
with the excellent crushing strength observed suggest that there is a good balance between mechanical strength and release properties. Metformin Denk (15.69±0.83) and Glucomet (14.34±0.43) had relatively highest disintegration time.

Table III. Hardness and friability tests of different brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets

| Drug product | Brand       | Hardness (N) ±SD | Friability (%) |
|--------------|-------------|------------------|----------------|
| Metformin 500 mg | Bigomet     | 199.5±0.836      | 0.036          |
|              | Brot        | 195.5±4.8        | 0.046          |
|              | Diabetamin  | 197.83±1.6       | 0.039          |
|              | Glucomet    | 170.66±6.15      | 0.116          |
|              | Metformin Denk | 168.66±4.72   | 0.117          |
|              | Neomid      | 156.5±7.86       | 0.127          |

Table IV. Disintegration tests and percentage drug content of different brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets

| Drug product   | Brand       | Disintegration time ±SD | Assay (%W/W ±SD) |
|----------------|-------------|-------------------------|------------------|
| Metformin HCl 500 mg | Bigomet     | 12.65±0.99 in Minutes | 101.64±4.14      |
|                 | Brot        | 6.44±1.64               | 97.18±2.2        |
|                 | Diabetamin  | 6.17±0.86               | 100.166±2.88     |
|                 | Glucomet    | 14.34±0.43              | 103.78±0.06      |
|                 | Metformin Denk | 15.69±0.83     | 103.85±0.12      |
|                 | Neomid      | 10.16±0.43              | 97.28±2.249      |

The results for actual content of different brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets are depicted in Table IV. The USP states that metformin hydrochloride tablets should contain not less than 95.0% and not more than 105.0% of the stated amount (USP, 2007). All products of metformin hydrochloride tablets passed as per the USP specification. The highest and lowest drug content was obtained for Metformin Denk (104.85%) and Brot (97.18), respectively.

Assay for the content of active ingredients is a critical test of quality, as all the physical properties tested are meant to optimize release of the drug from the product. So, no matter how perfect a product may be in terms of physical parameters, failure to meet the standard for content of active ingredients will result in poor quality with adverse consequences (Ogah and Kadejo, 2013).

Pair-wise comparisons of products of metformin hydrochloride tablets were performed by one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) multiple comparisons. Statistical comparison for mean difference of drug content with 95% confidence interval indicated that there is no significance difference in the drug content of Diabetamin and Bigomet with other products of metformin hydrochloride tablets (P>0.05). Similarly, Metformin Denk was not significantly different from Glucomet (P<0.05). However, Metformin Denk and Glucomet products were significantly different in the drug content from Neomid and Brot (P<0.05). Such differences in drug content could raise doubts on the general equivalence of the brands.

Chemical assay

Dissolution test

The dissolution profiles of the six brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets are illustrated in Figure 1. According to USP (2007), the amount of metformin hydrochloride released within 30 min should not be less than 80% of the stated amount. From the dissolution test results shown in Table V, all the brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets studied released more than 80% within 30 min except Metformin Denk which has released only 68.39±0.068. Hence, five of the products complied with USP dissolution tolerance limits but Metformin Denk failed to release the stated amount.
Dissolution of drugs can be influenced by the physicochemical properties of the drug substance, the dosage form design, the manufacturing process, and the testing conditions (i.e., apparatus, agitation, medium, etc).

A good *in vitro-in vivo* correlation can allow the use of *in vitro* dissolution studies for prediction of product *in vivo* performance and, therefore, *in vitro* dissolution profiles can be utilized as a surrogate for *in vivo* bioequivalence or bioavailability studies.

### Table V. Time dependent drug release of products of metformin hydrochloride tablets

| Sampling time (min) | Neomid | Bigomet | Met. Denk | Brot | Diabetamin | Glucomet |
|--------------------|--------|---------|-----------|------|------------|---------|
| 10                 | 38.05± 0.02 | 24.2±0.037 | 24.53±0.05 | 35.03± 0.02 | 43.32±0.09 | 31.32± 0.08 |
| 20                 | 76.49± 0.07 | 52.97±0.051 | 47.20±0.04 | 64.47± 0.05 | 72.43± 0.1 | 61.97± 0.05 |
| 30                 | 88.60± 0.02 | 81.62±0.039 | 68.39±0.07 | 85.48± 0.01 | 81.88± 0.03 | 80.23± 0.01 |
| 45                 | 95±0.004 | 89.51±0.011 | 79.310.044 | 96.86± 0.01 | 90.81± 0.006 | 95.75± 0.0 |
| 60                 | 98.02±0.005 | 92.23±0.01 | 87.96±0.035 | 97.86± 0.01 | 91.68± 0.009 | 97.3± 0.01 |

It was observed that Brot with the second smaller disintegration time (6.44 min), showed fast percentage drug release and Metformin Denk with the highest disintegration time (15.69 min), showed low percentage of drug release within 30 min which agrees with the general concept that fast disintegrating tablets release their drugs easily and vice versa. The higher rate of disintegration of tablet dosage forms indicates faster break down of a tablet into smaller particles and thus, enhanced the dissolution of the medicaments into the blood circulation, increasing bioavailability (Chandrasekaran *et al.*, 2011).

Statistical analysis was conducted for the pharmacopoeially specified time, 30 min, using Tukey’s one-way ANOVA. The statistical comparison of the release profile of the different products of metformin hydrochloride tablets indicated that at 95% confidence interval, there is significance difference in the drug release of Metformin Denk with other products of metformin hydrochloride tablets (P< 0.05). In addition, the percent drug releases for Bigomet, Diabetamin and Glucomet at 30 min were significantly different from Neomid (P< 0.05). Similarly, Bigomet was significantly different in the drug release from Glucomet (P< 0.05). However, the percent drug releases for Brot, Bigomet and Glucomet were not significantly different from Diabetamin (P>0.05).

Statistically, with 95% confidence interval, some of the products of metformin hydrochloride tablets showed significant difference (P<0.05), indicating differences in their *in vitro* drug release that might affect the *in vivo* bioavailability and the bioequivalence of the products. Thus, the differences in dissolution profiles are likely to reflect potential differences in clinical performance of the products.

Comparison of *in vitro* dissolution profiles of drug products may be accomplished by using a model independent or a model-dependent (curve fitting) approach. In the model-independent approach, the data are described by sample times (e.g. t50%, t90%, mean dissolution time, similarity factor (f2), or a dissimilarity factor (f1)).

$t_{50%}$ and $t_{90%}$ were used as dissolution parameters to compare dissolution profiles of the different brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets. The $t_{50%}$ and $t_{90%}$ are the dissolution parameters that can be utilized to analyze dissolution profile of different pharmaceutical products. The $t_{50%}$ and $t_{90%}$ are the times taken for 50% and 90% of the drug to be released respectively. The $t_{50%}$ and $t_{90%}$ of the different products of metformin hydrochloride tablets analyzed are shown in Table VI. The results showed that, 50% and 90% release have been achieved within relatively short period of time for Brot.
Table VI. t_{50%} and t_{90%} values of products of metformin hydrochloride tablets

| Brand      | Dissolution parameters |    |
|------------|------------------------|----|
|            | t_{50%}(min)           | t_{90%}(min) |
| Bigomet    | 14.623                 | 48.577    |
| Diabetamin | 18                     | 59.8      |
| Brot       | 9.39                   | 31.2      |
| Met. Denk  | 18.886                 | 62.74     |
| Neomid     | 10.376                 | 34.469    |
| Glucomct   | 9.987                  | 33.178    |

(t_{50%}=9.39 min, t_{90%}=31.2 min), Glucomct (t_{50%}=9.987 min, t_{90%}=33.178 min) and Neomid (t_{50%}=10.376 min, t_{90%}=34.469 min) and hence, they are expected to be absorbed and become bio available within a short period of time. Relatively longer t_{50%}(18.886) and t_{90%}(62.74) values have been obtained for Metformin Denk and hence, the product may manifest lower rate and extent of bioavailability in the body.

Conclusions

This study was aimed to assess quality as well as physicochemical bioequivalence of six brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets marketed in Addis Ababa using in vitro methods. The study confirmed that brands of metformin hydrochloride tablets complied with the official specification for hardness, friability, assay and disintegration. Five brands of metformin hydrochloride complied with the USP dissolution tolerance limits but Metformin Denk failed to release the stated amount.

Statistical comparison for in vitro drug release showed that some of the products of metformin hydrochloride tablets have significant difference (P<0.05), indicating difference in their in vitro drug release that might affect the in vivo bioavailability and the bioequivalence of the products.

Acknowledgments

Authors are grateful to the Ethiopian Food, Medicine and Health Care Administration and Control Authority (EFMHACA) for donating metformin standard. Their sincere thanks goes to Addis Ababa University and Wollo University for sponsoring this study.

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