Abstract

The use of thalidomide was never discontinued in Brazil where it is prescribed for leprosy type 2 reaction. Babies with birth defects compatible with the thalidomide embryopathy phenotype were born after 1965, an indication that control on drug dispensing and use failed in the country. The article reports data on thalidomide dispensing and clinical uses in the Federal District in 2011/12, when new rules were put into effect, and data on drug dispensing and use obtained ten years earlier. It was found that the number of patients making use of thalidomide declined from 819 in 2001 to 369 in 2011/12. Leprosy accounted for over 70% of prescriptions in both time periods analyzed in this study. In the same time interval, however, use for lupus erythematosus decreased from 13.7 to 4.9%, while that for multiple myeloma increased from 2.9 to 20.3% of all prescriptions. Thalidomide prescription for the remaining approved indications was far less frequent, and so was the use for off label indications that accounted for <1% of prescriptions in 2001 and 2011/12. Registration of prescribing doctors, patients and dispensing units at the state department of health, apparently rendered this control more effective and reliable.

Keywords

Thalidomide, Off-label uses, Leprosy, Drug control, Multiple myeloma, Lupus erythematosus.