

Which drug  
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## **Which Drug Form is Preferred by Doctors and Patients?**

### **Introduction**

In the years 1978, 1979 and 1980, attempts were made in the USA and West Germany to assess the popularity of the most common drug forms by a poll of both patients and doctors.

In the USA the poll took the form of telephone interviews and in West Germany it was carried out by face-to-face questioning of individuals. The investigations were supplemented by analytical procedures used in psychology (scaling, correlation, rank tests).

The answers obtained to the various groups of questions are discussed here under the appropriate headings.

### **What Do Those Questioned See as Important Properties of a Drug Form?**

Most of the patients have clear priorities where drug forms are concerned. The gelatin capsule and sugar- or film-coated dragée are unquestionably preferred to the tablet and fluid forms, with both the German and American patient putting forward the same arguments in the same order. The preference for capsules and dragées is based mainly on the ease with which they can be swallowed and on their neutral taste.

There are two characteristics that make the dragée especially popular. The dragée, on account of its sweetness and the fact that it can be swallowed without drinking, may enjoy a slight preference of capsule among patients.

Thanks to their lack of a covering, the tablet and suppository give patients an impression of rapid and intensive action, though neither of these forms is regarded favorable by a majority of the patients. As far as anticipated effectiveness is concerned, fluid drug forms such as syrups and drops are rated the same as tablets.

Patients in no way regard the multiplicity of drug forms offered as a whim of the manufacturers. On the contrary, they consider it to reflect simply different modes of action, dosages and fields of disease, and above all a desire to satisfy individual tastes where medicines are concerned.

Like the patients, most of the doctors questioned in West Germany prefer solid oral drug forms, whereby no great difference is seen between the various forms themselves. This view is in sharp contrast to that of the North American doctors, who not only regard capsules as the drug form with the brightest future but already prefer the gelatin capsule to the dragée or tablet. The lack of a clear preference for hard or soft gelatin capsules on the part of the German doctors is probably due to a misapprehension, namely the association of gelatin capsules with the presence of chemical and other foreign substances. In fact, precisely the opposite is the case, since as a rule formulations of drugs for hard gelatin capsules need the fewest adjuvants.<sup>1</sup>

Those patients and doctors preferring the gelatin capsule and dragée to the other forms do so principally because they are easily, pleasantly and rapidly swallowed. The next major characteristic is their neutral taste, though this opinion must be accepted with some reserve in view of the sweetness of the coated tablet.

Most of the patients regard the gelatin capsule as the most modern form, while the doctors see it as the drug form of the future, especially from the standpoint of patient compliance.

<sup>1</sup>Capsugel will shortly be issuing a News Sheet dealing with the use of adjuvants in various solid drug formulations. This publication will emphasize the small number of adjuvants needed when gelatin capsules are used.

One-third of the German and 15% of the American patients profess to exercise an influence on the doctor's choice of administration form and consider that doctors meet their wishes in this respect whenever possible. The doctors confirm that patients sometimes express a wish for a particular form. These are findings of the greatest importance where patient compliance is concerned.

In the USA patients replied to the question, which form they would prefer if the preparation they had to take were available in all possible forms, as follows:

44% would choose a gelatin capsule, 26% a dragée and only 13% a tablet. The remaining 17% gave no clear answer to this question.

An extremely interesting finding was that where prescription drugs are concerned, 30% of the patients would still choose the gelatin capsule even if the price were about 35% higher.

These views expressed by doctors and patients clearly demonstrate the important role now played by the gelatin capsule in drug therapy.

In general, the studies also show how extremely important it is to choose the right administration form when a new preparation is to be launched.

### **What About the Risk of Confusion?**

Where several preparations are being administered at the same time, most doctors consider the risk of confusion to be high or very high. In the view of the doctor, this is above all the case with patients being treated with several drugs and during the issue of drugs in hospitals.

Unlike the doctors, the patients consider the risk of confusion to be small. The study revealed that all those questioned, without exception, kept their medicines in the original package, which of course very much reduces the chance of confusion. When asked about which

characteristic of a preparation they thought best for distinguishing it, most of the patients gave the answer 'color'. Other distinguishing features mentioned were the imprint and then the shape.

Here the views of the doctor and the patient coincide, except that the former rates the imprint before the shape only when it is sufficiently large and legible. A major argument in favor of color is the convenience aspect. Both doctors and patients reason that conspicuously colored drugs make a deeper impression than other distinguishing features, such as imprinting and shape.

Patients have good memories where drugs are concerned, as the table below makes clear. It again shows that color is the dominating characteristic of pharmaceutical preparations and therefore the best means of identifying them.

Characteristic	Percentage of patients questioned who recalled the characteristic
Color	100%
Name	91%
Dosage Form	84%
Shape	66%
Size	39%
Others	15%

Capacity of patients to recall important characteristics of drugs. (At the time of being questioned, most of the patients had not been taking their particular medicines for longer than 4 weeks. 80% of the patients were taking more than two preparations at the same time. Of the preparations concerned, 89 were in tablet form, 54 in capsule form, and 36 in dragée form.)

Color and an easily legible imprint are therefore the best distinguishing characteristics for a variety of drug forms. It follows that for safety reasons, the gelatin capsule must be preferred to the other forms: the gelatin capsule is the only form in which these two characteristics can be satisfactorily exploited.

## **Conclusion**

A poll of doctors and patients demonstrated that the most popular drug forms are the gelatin capsule and the dragée. Tablets, like fluid forms such as syrups and drops, are viewed much less favorable. The popularity of the first-named two forms is attributable mainly to the fact that they are easily and pleasantly swallowed. The gelatin capsule can be regarded as the ideal administration form since it can carry a multiplicity of color combinations as well as an easily legible imprint. In this way it makes a notable contribution to drug safety.

The study showed clearly that the right choice of administration form is a matter of the greatest importance in introducing a new preparation and that in general the gelatin capsule can be seen as the drug form of the future.