Steroid-sparing effect of pimecrolimus cream 1% in children with severe atopic dermatitis

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OBJECTIVE: To investigate if pimecrolimus cream 1% reduces the need for steroids in the long-term management of severe pediatric atopic dermatitis (AD). METHODS: A total of 184 pediatric patients (aged 2-17 years) with a history of severe AD according to Rajka and Langeland were enrolled. Patients were randomized to treatment with pimecrolimus cream or vehicle cream for a 24-week period. Prednicarbate 0.25% was applied as rescue medication. RESULTS: Patients on pimecrolimus required steroids on a mean of 29% of study days, compared with 35% of patients on vehicle (p = 0.1841). On the head and neck only, the respective figures were 10 versus 19% (p = 0.0009). In patients enrolled with acute severe disease (Investigator's Global Assessment > or = 4), steroids were used on 28% of the days in the pimecrolimus group compared to 45% in the control group (p = 0.0024). On the head and neck, steroids were used on 10% of study days with pimecrolimus versus 30% with vehicle (p < 0.0001). CONCLUSION: The results indicate that the need for topical steroids on the head and neck is reduced with pimecrolimus cream 1% in the management of severe pediatric AD according to the definition of Rajka and Langeland.