

MY EXPERIENCE WITH T.R.U.E. TEST™

In 1989, I took charge of the Contact Dermatitis Clinic at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montréal, QC. Initially, I was patch testing around 150 patients per year, but within two to three years, once the referral base was well established, this number increased to roughly 400 patients per year. Altogether, the number of allergens applied to each patient also increased considerably. It is not unusual nowadays to apply between 80 and 100 individual substances on a single patient.

Preparing such a high number of allergens is extremely time-consuming. In the early days of the Clinic, the patch test technician was available only on Mondays and was spending the entire day applying allergens to Finn Chambers® and sticking them to the patients' backs. She never had enough time to prepare the strips in advance, and I slowly saw my patients' waiting time increase to six months.

I was desperately looking for a solution that would improve the efficiency of the Clinic when T.R.U.E. Test™ became available. During the first half of the 1990s, I was able to buy it directly from the manufacturer, Kabi-Pharmacia in Sweden, at a reasonable price. My technician and I really appreciated its ease and speed of application: no more messing around for seven to ten minutes with 24 individual allergens, it took only 30 seconds to open the packaging, peel off the backing and stick the two strips on the patient's back. This time saving device freed my technician to prepare supplemental series, and I was eventually able to test two to three additional patients each week.

Not only was T.R.U.E. Test™ easy to use, patients also felt that it was more comfortable than other devices, due to its thinness. Adherence to the skin was excellent, and the fact that the allergens are dispersed in a semi-solid gel eliminated the problem of running or smearing encountered in hot conditions with conventional allergens. Furthermore, I felt confident that all patients were consistently exposed to the same amount of allergen, a feature that made interpretation of the patch tests results more meaningful.

Because of stringent requirements by the Food and Drug Administration, the cost of introducing T.R.U.E. Test™ in the United States was astronomical. Distribution rights for the American continent were ceded to Glaxo and the price per kit more than tripled. Given the economic context of the Québec health system, I could no longer afford to use T.R.U.E. Test™, and it is with some regret that I went back to the old system. My waiting list started to lengthen again...

Nowadays, the Contact Dermatitis Clinic operates smoothly: another staff dermatologist has been recruited, we have increased our periods of patch testing and we have better ancillary support. Our waiting time is now one month from the initial patient evaluation. In 2001, I became a member of the North American Contact Dermatitis Group and I must use the standard series of allergens specifically devised and regularly modified by this group of researchers.

T.R.U.E. Test™ is now easily available in Canada and is competitively priced. If I were an independent patch tester, I would not hesitate in reintroducing this convenient device in my clinical practice, supplemented as needed with conventional allergens.

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