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GASTROENTEROLOGY BOARD REVIEW MANUAL

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Pharmacologic Therapies for Inflammatory Bowel Disease

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I. INTRODUCTION

The therapy for inflammatory bowel disease has come a long way since the introduction in the 1930s of sulfasalazine, the first therapeutic agent directed specifically at ulcerative colitis. The next major advance was the use of corticosteroids in the 1950s, followed by the use of immunosuppressants in the 1970s and 5-aminosalicylate derivatives in the 1980s. Using this broad therapeutic armamentarium, the physician has had a wide choice of medications ranging from the relatively mild to the extremely powerful.

Not all patients with inflammatory bowel disease require prednisone or immunotherapy. Some patients who are diagnosed with inflammatory bowel disease because of occult blood in the stool may be asymptomatic and no therapy is required. Many patients with mild symptoms respond well to the mesalamine products. One form of mesalamine, Pentasa, is released in

the small bowel and colon and may be the first-line therapy for mild Crohn's disease involving the small bowel. On the other hand, Asacol, a delayed-release form of mesalamine, is released only in the colon and is reserved for ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease of the large bowel. Mesalamine administered rectally, in either suppository or enema form, may be used alone for rectosigmoid disease or in combination with oral mesalamine for more extensive colitis.

Prednisone and other corticosteroids should generally be reserved for patients who fail more conservative therapy (with the exception of patients with refractory ulcerative proctitis, in whom prednisone is less effective than local therapy). Prednisone, cyclosporine, and the newest agent available, infliximab, are used to *induce* a therapeutic remission because their onset of action is rapid. Conversely, azathioprine and 6-mercaptopurine (6-MP) are used primarily to *maintain* a therapeutic remission. These concepts of induction of remission and maintenance of remission allow medications that generally are