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The occurrence of two polymorphs of D-penicillamine

J. A. G. VIDLER, *Analytical Service Laboratories, Dista Products Ltd., Liverpool L24 9LN, U.K.*

D-Penicillamine, which may be chemically described as D-3,3-dimethylcysteine or D-3-mercaptovaline, is the required enantiomer for pharmaceutical preparations. The United States Pharmacopeia Nineteenth Revision, 1975, requires that D-penicillamine conforms to the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 21, Food and Drugs, part 440.51, 1974. These regulations include an infrared identity test where a comparison is made with an authentic specimen, samples being prepared as paraffin oil mulls. The British Pharmacopoeia, 1973 has no infrared identity test or other requirement for an authentic specimen of D-penicillamine.

Infrared absorption spectra were recorded for samples from the known commercial sources on a Perkin-Elmer 157G grating infrared spectrophotometer, the samples being prepared both as paraffin oil mulls and potassium bromide discs. These spectra were found to be consistent from a given source but showed significant differences between sources, the differences being independent of the method of sample preparation. As all samples were of satisfactory quality when tested to the British Pharmacopoeia specification, it appeared that the spectral behaviour was due to the occurrence of different crystal forms.

All spectra could be classified as arising from one or other of two distinct crystal forms or from mixtures of these two forms. The form corresponding to that of the United States Food and Drug Administration authentic specimen is referred to as polymorph II and the other as polymorph I. Although seven significant spectral differences were observed between 700 and 1350 cm^{-1} , one feature was diagnostic.

This was at 1092 cm^{-1} where polymorph II had an absorption peak that was more intense than the adjacent peaks at about 1050 and 1160 cm^{-1} while polymorph I had a minimum between peaks at 1078

and 1101 cm^{-1} that were less intense than the adjacent peaks at about 1050 and 1160 cm^{-1} . In the compilation by Pouchert (1970) the infrared spectrum recorded for D-penicillamine is of polymorph II.

Under the polarizing microscope both polymorphs were seen as anisotropic crystals, I as needles and II as plates. Samples selected on the basis of the infrared classification were then examined on a focussing, Guinier-type, X-ray powder diffraction camera and the resulting patterns confirmed that forms I and II were different crystalline phases.

Thermal methods failed to distinguish between the polymorphs. In capillaries using a heated block, or on a microscope hot stage under liquid paraffin, extensive decomposition and volatilisation rather than melting was observed. Differential thermal analysis using a DuPont 900 Thermal Analyzer was applied to samples in aluminium pans in atmospheres of air or nitrogen. Heating at 10° min^{-1} from room temperature gave one endotherm only for either polymorph with an onset at 185° which corresponded to the onset of decomposition in the hot stage preparations.

Penicillamine formulations on the United Kingdom market have been found to contain one or other or a mixture of these polymorphs. As reported by Kang, Kendall & Lee (1974), tablet and capsule excipients did not interfere with the identification or classification of the drug substance by infrared spectroscopy. Dosage form stability in the case of compressed tablets of 250 mg has shown no dependence on the penicillamine crystal form over the prescribed shelf life, taking into consideration the appearance, penicillamine content and disintegration time. From the available evidence it appears that the two polymorphs alone or in admixture are equally acceptable in pharmaceutical dosage forms.

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