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### C. DIFF INFECTION

C. diff Infection is shorthand for an antibiotic-induced diarrhea caused by the bacteria *Clostridium difficile*.

This germ is becoming increasingly common as the cause of persisting, recurring, difficult-to-treat diarrhea. Mostly found in older patients who have been hospitalized and on IV antibiotics, it is spreading in the community among special populations (nursing home residents) but also can be seen among the general public.

This is another infection that is an increasing problem due to the overuse of antibiotics.

C. diff diarrhea is characterized by severe and persisting watery bowel movements occurring after a course of antibiotics (either oral or IV form). Although diarrhea is not uncommon after antibiotics due to the effects on the normal bowel bacteria (flora), this diarrhea is much more severe, often causing extremely urgent liquid bowel movements or even accidents in your underwear.

Recognition/Diagnosis:

Think of C. diff diarrhea if you have persisting diarrhea lasting more than 2 weeks after you complete a course of antibiotics or if you have diarrhea that is so extreme it results in accidents during the day or at night-time.

The diagnosis can be confirmed by a stool test for C. diff toxin, but this test is imperfect. Under suspicious conditions I will often treat empirically.

#### **Treatment:**

There are two primary treatments for C. diff diarrhea and they are both antibiotics that preferentially eliminate the C. diff bacteria and allow normal intestinal bacteria to remain safe. These medications are:

- Flagyl (metronidazole)
- Vancocin (vancomycin)

**Flagyl (metronidazole):** is inexpensive but many people find it causes nausea. As a result this is often the 'first line' therapy, but many times [we] you will have to stop this

antibiotic due to intolerance of side effects. That said, it is still very safe and if it works for you...great.

**Vancocin (vancomycin):** is an expensive antibiotic but is wonderfully effective for treating *C. diff* and has virtually no side effects.

To get around cost issues we often have a liquid form made up by the formulating pharmacies (Civic Center Pharmacy, Avella Pharmacy, Ranch Pharmacy, Camelback Village Pharmacy). This is much less expensive.

Treatment regimens are 10—14 days typically, but many patients have persisting symptoms and require either a second round of antibiotics or a prolonged tapering regimen of antibiotic in which [we] you use the medication for several weeks or months in a gradually declining dose.

**Sachromyces boulardii:** This ‘good’ germ, a type of yeast, can help in resolution of a bout of *C. diff* diarrhea and can also prevent future infections. It provides a competitor to the *C. diff* germ, enhancing the body’s own protection mechanisms.

This product is now over-the-counter in the form of Florastor. It is generally available at pharmacies and grocery stores.

### **Prevention:**

To prevent spreading and future bouts of *C. diff* [or its spread] do the following:

- Wash your hands regularly and use an alcohol-based cleanser often.
- Try not to share the bathroom of the patient during the first few weeks of treatment. Otherwise, a thorough cleaning with bleach-based products of the toilet and basin area is critical.
- Avoid additional courses of antibiotics for infection. Take antibiotics only if essential for curing a highly probable or documented infection
- Florastor (*Sachromyces boulardii*) daily may be protective, but this is not proven.