

Poor Design Limits Conclusions

MY TAKE

The value of warfarin genotyping in the real world was not established by this study. There is some doubt that warfarin has a disease-modifying effect of equal magnitude on other primary-disease etiologies. One has to assume that we are merely seeing a Hawthorne effect on a population with much closer and better follow-up.

Even when you include propensi-

ty scoring, you can control only for the baseline variables that you can see. The dynamic variables that occur by following patients with warfarin titration are not accounted for by the propensity score analysis. Also, there is considerable doubt as to whether control patients were equally managed post intervention, and there were no data on the international normalized ratio achieved.

My conclusion is that the outcome was more likely the result of closer attention and better follow-up. The trial design was not adequate to answer the question that was posed.

MANDEEP R. MEHRA, M.B.B.S., is head of the division of cardiology at the University of Maryland in Baltimore. He has received consulting fees or honoraria from Medtronic, St. Jude/Boston Scientific, Solvay, and Geron.

Clopidogrel Plus Aspirin Cost Effective

BY BRUCE JANCIN

ATLANTA — Adding clopidogrel to aspirin for stroke prevention in warfarin-unsuitable patients with atrial fibrillation is cost neutral, according to a new secondary economic analysis of the ACTIVE-A trial.

What this means is that the substantial cost of adding brand-name clopidogrel (Plavix) to aspirin therapy is canceled out by the resultant considerable savings resulting from fewer strokes, even after taking into account the costs related to clopidogrel-associated bleeding complications, Dr. Andre Lamy said at the annual meeting of the American College of Cardiology.

The good news for health plans is that clopidogrel will go generic in just a few months in the United States and most of the rest of the world. At that point, using clopidogrel plus aspirin instead of aspirin alone to protect against strokes in patients with atrial fibrillation who can't take warfarin will no longer be cost neutral, it will actually become cost saving, according to Dr. Lamy, a surgeon and clinical epidemiologist at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont.

"It's very unusual to see that with a drug. Health care systems will get good value for the investment. The strokes are quite expensive," he observed in an interview.

ACTIVE-A (Atrial Fibrillation Clopidogrel Trial With Irbesartan for Prevention of Vascular Events—Aspirin) was a randomized trial involving 7,554 patients with atrial fibrillation in 33 countries who were deemed unsuitable for warfarin. The primary outcomes have previously been published: a 28% reduction in the risk of stroke with dual preventive therapy compared to aspirin alone during a median 3.6 years of follow-up, which came at the expense of a 57% increase in risk of major hemorrhage (*N. Engl. J. Med.* 2009;360:2066-78).

For every 1,000 patients treated with clopidogrel and aspirin for 3 years, there were 28 fewer strokes than with aspirin alone, including 17 fewer disabling or fatal ones, 6 fewer MIs, and 20 additional major bleeding episodes, 3 of which were fatal.

Dr. Lamy and coinvestigators calculated the direct medical costs associated with these outcomes using Canadian cost rates, which are similar to Medicare costs. They determined that although dual therapy cost an average of \$2,114 Canadian more, this was counterbalanced by the savings achieved through strokes avoided, even after subtracting the costs associated with the major bleeding incidents. ■

Disclosures: Dr. Lamy said that this economic analysis as well as the ACTIVE-A trial were funded by grants from Sanofi-Aventis and Bristol-Myers Squibb.

It's never too early to have the "insulin talk"

Some conversations may be hard to initiate. Take the "insulin talk," for example. According to the American Diabetes Association, insulin is the most effective agent for lowering blood glucose.¹ It works as part of an overall diabetes treatment plan, which may include diet, exercise, and other diabetes medication. Having the "insulin talk" early may help patients accept insulin as a potential treatment option to help them achieve their A1C goals.²

The results of having a positive "insulin talk" can be impactful: in a survey, about 80% of patients with type 2 diabetes on OADs said they'd consider taking insulin if their doctor recommended it.³ So by starting the dialogue now, you can help your patients have a better understanding of insulin as an effective treatment option for lowering blood glucose.

Insulin—a chance for successful glycemic control, not a punishment for failure

Patients may focus on blaming themselves for their uncontrolled blood glucose, but you can help them focus on turning this negative mindset into positive action for managing their disease.² The United Kingdom Prospective Diabetes Study showed that by the time patients with type 2 diabetes are diagnosed, they may already have lost up to 50% of their beta-cell function, and this function may continue to decline.⁴

Because the disease is progressive, many patients with type 2 diabetes may eventually need insulin to achieve or maintain glycemic control.^{2,5} But by the time patients with type 2 diabetes are prescribed insulin, they may have had diabetes for 10 to 15 years and may already have complications due to a prolonged period of uncontrolled blood glucose.⁶ Starting insulin earlier in the disease continuum for appropriate patients can help improve glycemic control. Controlling blood glucose can reduce the risk of diabetes-related complications.^{5,6}

Treatment plans and glycemic targets should be individualized for each patient.

Insulin is indicated to help improve glycemic control in patients with diabetes mellitus.

Important Safety Information About Insulin

Possible side effects may include blood glucose levels that are too low, injection site reactions, and allergic reactions, including itching and rash. Other medications and supplements could change the way insulin works. Glucose monitoring is recommended for patients with diabetes.

THE "INSULIN TALK"

Have the talk early and as needed, to help destigmatize insulin²

- Reassure patients that using insulin doesn't mean failure and that insulin may help replace what the body is no longer adequately making
- Turn the negative mindset of failure into a positive opportunity to take personal control of A1C

Put insulin therapy in context

- Explain the benefits of maintaining blood glucose goals and the risks associated with insulin therapy
- Talk about how insulin may be worth the effort—insulin is an effective treatment option that works as part of an overall treatment plan to lower blood glucose

Identify patients' personal obstacles and help defuse the "scary" factor²

- Today's insulin injections generally cause little discomfort and are administered using small, thin needles^{2,6}
- Insulin pens make insulin more convenient to administer and are discreet²
- Insulin dose may need to be adjusted up or down over the course of treatment depending on how a patient's body responds⁵

INSULIN

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