

Dabigatran versus Warfarin in Patients with Atrial Fibrillation

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Presented by: Naji Saleh(FM-R2) at the Grey Nuns Tertiary Palliative Care Unit, Apr.07/2011

BACKGROUND

Warfarin reduces the risk of stroke in patients with atrial fibrillation but increases the risk of hemorrhage and is difficult to use. Dabigatran is a new oral direct thrombin inhibitor.

METHODS

In this noninferiority trial, randomly assigned 18,113 patients who had atrial fibrillation and a risk of stroke to receive, in a blinded fashion, fixed doses of dabigatran — 110 mg or 150 mg twice daily — or, in an unblinded fashion, adjusted-dose warfarin. The median duration of the follow-up period was 2.0 years. The primary outcome was stroke or systemic embolism.

RESULTS

Rates of the primary outcome were 1.69% per year in the warfarin group, as compared with 1.53% per year in the group that received 110 mg of dabigatran (relative risk with dabigatran, 0.91; 95% confidence interval [CI], 0.74 to 1.11; $P < 0.001$ for noninferiority) and 1.11% per year in the group that received 150 mg of dabigatran (relative risk, 0.66; 95% CI, 0.53 to 0.82; $P < 0.001$ for superiority). The rate of major bleeding was 3.36% per year in the warfarin group, as compared with 2.71% per year in the group receiving 110 mg of dabigatran ($P = 0.003$) and 3.11% per year in the group receiving 150 mg of dabigatran ($P = 0.31$). The rate of hemorrhagic stroke was 0.38% per year in the warfarin group, as compared with 0.12% per year with 110 mg of dabigatran ($P < 0.001$) and 0.10% per year with 150 mg of dabigatran ($P < 0.001$). The mortality rate was 4.13% per year in the warfarin group, as compared with 3.75% per year with 110 mg of dabigatran ($P = 0.13$) and 3.64% per year with 150 mg of dabigatran ($P = 0.051$).

CONCLUSIONS

In patients with atrial fibrillation, dabigatran given at a dose of 110 mg was associated with rates of stroke and systemic embolism that were similar to those associated with warfarin, as well as lower rates of major hemorrhage. Dabigatran administered at a dose of 150 mg, as compared with warfarin, was associated with lower rates of stroke and systemic embolism but similar rates of major hemorrhage. (ClinicalTrials.gov number, NCT00262600.)

STRENGTHS

- Large sample size (18113 patients , 967centres, 44countries)
- No blood tests required
- Randomized, Open label, Blinded endpoint study

WEAKNESSES

- Antidotes were not used
- Expensive treatment
- Short duration of the study, unknown long term side effect.
- Pharmaceutical funding

RELEVANCE TO PALLIATIVE CARE

- Less risk of bleeding
- No INR needed which fits Palliative care patients needs
- Less risk of stroke
- No dietary restriction needed
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