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Clopidogrel and modified-release dipyridamole in the prevention of occlusive vascular events

Understanding NICE guidance – information for people who have had an occlusive vascular event, or who have symptomatic peripheral arterial disease, their families and carers, and the public

Ordering information

You can download the following documents from www.nice.org.uk/TA090:

- this booklet
- the full guidance on this appraisal
- a short version for health professionals – the quick reference guide
- the assessment report – details of all the studies that were looked at.

For printed copies of the quick reference guide or information for the public, phone the NHS Response Line on 0870 1555 455 and quote:

- N0838 (quick reference guide)
- N0754 (information for the public).

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What is NICE guidance?

The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) is the independent organisation responsible for providing national guidance on the promotion of good health and the prevention and treatment of ill health. One of NICE's roles is to produce guidance (recommendations) on the use of medicines, medical equipment, diagnostic tests and clinical and surgical procedures within the NHS in England and Wales.

To produce this guidance, NICE looks at how well the medicine, equipment or procedure works and also how well it works in relation to how much it costs. This process is called an appraisal. The appraisal process involves the manufacturer of the medicine or equipment for which guidance is being produced and the organisations that represent the healthcare professionals, patients and carers who will be affected by the guidance.

NICE was asked to look at the available evidence on the use of clopidogrel and modified-release dipyridamole in the prevention of occlusive vascular events. NICE was asked to provide guidance that will help the NHS in England and Wales decide when clopidogrel and modified-release dipyridamole (MR dipyridamole) should be used.

What is an occlusive vascular event?

An occlusive vascular event is the medical term for what happens when a blood vessel (for example an artery) becomes blocked so that the normal amount of blood can't get through it. This is usually caused by a build-up of a fatty substance on the walls of the arteries (the medical name for this is atherosclerosis). This makes the arteries narrower than normal. An occlusive event usually happens when an area of the fatty deposit breaks up in one of the arteries. This sets off a chain of events that can end with blood clots forming, and blocking the already narrow artery.

Depending on where the blockage happens, the following 'events' could occur:

- a stroke, where the blood supply to the brain is affected. If it happens for more than 24 hours it's known as an ischaemic stroke. If it happens for a shorter time it's known as a mini stroke or a transient ischaemic attack
- a heart attack (a myocardial infarction), where the blood supply to the heart is reduced.

Sometimes it's one of the arteries that takes blood to the arms or legs that's affected, and the person feels pain in the arm or leg. This is known as symptomatic peripheral arterial disease.

What are clopidogrel and MR dipyridamole?

Clopidogrel and dipyridamole are medicines that help to prevent blood clots from forming in arteries (they are known as antiplatelet medicines).

MR dipyridamole is a special type of tablet that has been made to release the dipyridamole medicine into the body over a longer period of time than with usual tablets.

What has NICE recommended on clopidogrel and MR dipyridamole?

During the appraisal, NICE's Appraisal Committee read and heard evidence from:

- good-quality clinical studies of clopidogrel and MR dipyridamole
- doctors with specialist knowledge of occlusive vascular events and peripheral arterial disease and their treatment
- individuals with specialist knowledge of the issues affecting people who have had an occlusive vascular event or who have symptomatic peripheral arterial disease
- organisations representing the views of people who will be affected by the guidance (because they have, or care for someone with, the condition or because they work in the NHS and are involved in providing care for people with the condition).

The evidence is summarised in the full guidance (see end for details). More information about the studies is provided in the assessment report for this appraisal (see end for details).

The recommendations NICE has made apply to people who have had an occlusive vascular event, or who have symptomatic peripheral arterial disease. The recommendations do not apply to people who have had, or are at risk of having, a stroke associated with atrial fibrillation (when the upper part of the heart beats faster than the rest of the heart), or people who need treatment to prevent occlusive events after having an operation on the blood vessels connected to the heart.

NICE has recommended that:

- the combination of MR dipyridamole and aspirin is used as part of the prevention of occlusive vascular events in people who have had an ischaemic stroke or a transient ischaemic attack for a period of 2 years from the most recent event. After this period of time, or if MR dipyridamole causes adverse effects, the person should receive standard care which includes long-term treatment with low-dose aspirin
- clopidogrel alone (within its licensed indications) is used as part of prevention of occlusive vascular events in people who are intolerant of low-dose aspirin and either have experienced an occlusive vascular event or have symptomatic peripheral arterial disease.

In these recommendations, NICE has defined aspirin intolerance as either:

- a proven hypersensitivity to aspirin or
- a history of severe indigestion caused by low-dose aspirin.

What should I do next?

If you or someone you care for has had an occlusive vascular event or has peripheral arterial disease, you should discuss this guidance with your or their doctor or specialist.

Will NICE review its guidance?

Yes. The guidance will be reviewed in April 2008.

Further information

The NICE website (www.nice.org.uk) has further information about NICE and the full guidance on clopidogrel and modified-release dipyridamole in the prevention of occlusive vascular events that has been issued to the NHS. The assessment report, which contains details of the studies that were looked at, is also available from the NICE website. A short version of the guidance (a 'quick reference guide') is available on the website and from the NHS Response Line (phone 0870 1555 455 and quote reference number N0838).

If you have access to the internet, you can find more information about strokes and heart problems on the NHS Direct website (www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk). You can also phone NHS Direct on 0845 46 47.

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