NICE National Institute for Health and Care Excellence

NICE guidance

Varenicline for smoking cessation

Technology appraisal guidance
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Your responsibility

The recommendations in this guidance represent the view of NICE, arrived at after careful consideration of the evidence available. When exercising their judgement, health professionals are expected to take this guidance fully into account, alongside the individual needs, preferences and values of their patients. The application of the recommendations in this guidance is at the discretion of health professionals and their individual patients and do not override the responsibility of healthcare professionals to make decisions appropriate to the circumstances of the individual patient, in consultation with the patient and/or their carer or guardian.

All problems (adverse events) related to a medicine or medical device used for treatment or in a procedure should be reported to the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency using the Yellow Card Scheme.

Commissioners and/or providers have a responsibility to provide the funding required to enable the guidance to be applied when individual health professionals and their patients wish to use it, in accordance with the NHS Constitution. They should do so in light of their duties to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, to advance equality of opportunity and to reduce health inequalities.

Commissioners and providers have a responsibility to promote an environmentally sustainable health and care system and should assess and reduce the environmental impact of implementing NICE recommendations wherever possible.

Contents

This guidance is the basis of QS43.

1 Recommendations

1.1 Varenicline is recommended within its licensed indications as an option for smokers who have expressed a desire to quit smoking.

1.2 Varenicline should normally be prescribed only as part of a programme of behavioural support.

2 Information about varenicline

2.1 Varenicline (Champix, Pfizer) has marketing authorisation for smoking cessation in adults. The summary of product characteristics (SPC) states that smokers should set a date to stop smoking and treatment with varenicline should start 1 to 2 weeks before this date and that smoking cessation therapies are more likely to succeed for patients who are provided with additional advice and support.

2.2 Varenicline binds with high affinity and selectivity at the alpha-4-beta-2 neuronal nicotinic acetylcholine receptor, where it acts as a partial agonist. Its binding both alleviates symptoms of craving and withdrawal, and reduces the rewarding and reinforcing effects of smoking by preventing nicotine binding to alpha-4-beta-2 receptors.

2.3 Varenicline may be associated with nausea and other gastrointestinal disorders such as vomiting. For full details of side effects and contraindications, see the SPC.

2.4 Varenicline is available in 0.5-mg and 1-mg film-coated tablets. The cost is £54.60 for a 56-blister pack of 0.5- or 1-mg tablets (BNF, edition 53). A 12-week course of treatment costs about £163.80. The SPC specifies the option of an additional 12 weeks of treatment and the consideration of dose tapering. Costs may vary in different settings because of negotiated procurement discounts.

3 Committee discussion

The manufacturer's submission

The appraisal committee considered evidence submitted by the manufacturer of varenicline and a review of this submission by the evidence review group.

3.1 The manufacturer's primary analysis compared the standard 12-week course of varenicline with bupropion and nicotine replacement therapy (NRT). The manufacturer identified 4 randomised controlled trials (RCTs). Two were 3-arm trials that compared varenicline, bupropion and placebo (n=1,483 and 1,413). Another trial compared maintenance treatment (24-week course of varenicline) with placebo (n=2,416). The manufacturer also presented data from an open-label trial (n=957) that compared varenicline with NRT.

3.2 The 2 trials that compared varenicline and bupropion showed that the continuous quit rate for weeks 9 to 12 was statistically significantly greater for varenicline: odds ratio (OR) 1.93 (95% CI 1.40 to 2.68) and OR 1.90 (95% CI 1.40 to 2.68), respectively. Both trials also showed that the continuous quit rate for varenicline was statistically significantly greater than for placebo: OR 3.85 (95% CI 2.70 to 5.50) and OR 3.85 (95% CI 2.69 to 5.50), respectively. For the longer time horizon of weeks 9 to 52, the ORs for varenicline compared with bupropion, respectively for the 2 trials, were 1.46 (95% CI 0.99 to 2.17) and 1.77 (95% CI 1.19 to 2.63). The maintenance trial that compared 24-week varenicline with placebo showed that the continuous quit rate was statistically significantly greater with varenicline than with placebo: weeks 13 to 24 OR 2.47 (95% CI 1.95 to 3.15); weeks 13 to 52 OR 1.35 (95% CI 1.07 to 1.70). The results of the open-label trial were marked confidential by the manufacturer.

3.3 The manufacturer also submitted a meta-analysis of 70 NRT trials, 12 bupropion trials and 4 varenicline trials against control or placebo. The meta-analysis indirectly compared the efficacy of the treatments based on relative treatment effects. This indirect comparison showed that at 12 months, varenicline was superior to NRT (OR 1.66 [CI 1.17 to 2.36]) and bupropion (OR 1.58 [95% CI 1.22 to 2.05]). Varenicline was also superior at 3 months to both NRT (OR 1.78 [95% CI

1.23 to 2.57]) and bupropion (OR 1.61 [95% CI 1.17 to 2.22]).

3.4 The manufacturer presented a cost-effectiveness analysis based on a Markov model. It assumes an individual makes a single quit attempt at the beginning of the model. The individual is followed from this initial quit attempt to various health states and potential comorbidities including lung cancer, asthma exacerbations, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, stroke and cardiovascular disease. The probabilities of relapsing and developing comorbidities are assumed to decrease over time from smoking cessation. The efficacy rates for the treatments are calculated from the odds ratios derived from the results of the pooled direct clinical trials and the indirect comparison. The probabilities associated with relapse are derived from relative risks reported in US-based long-term longitudinal and cohort studies into smoking and abstinence. The costs and utilities are derived from several published sources. Some health-related utility estimates are based on US data, including baseline health-related utilities.

3.5 The base-case analysis showed that over a lifetime horizon varenicline dominated bupropion and NRT – that is, it was cheaper and more effective. Variation of the time horizon used in the analysis showed that, at 20 years and over, varenicline maintained its dominating position. Sensitivity analyses included altering baseline health-related utilities and costs of NRT, and the use of efficacy rates from the direct open-label trial that compared varenicline with NRT. Over a lifetime horizon varenicline dominated NRT and bupropion in all sensitivity analysis.

3.6 The ERG noted that the inclusion and exclusion criteria of the meta-analysis in the manufacturer's submission differed from existing analyses by the Cochrane collaboration and considered that they could overestimate the efficacy of varenicline. The ERG also conducted its own meta-analysis and indirect comparison which suggested that the odds ratio for varenicline in comparison with NRT was lower than in the manufacturer's model: OR 1.54 (95% CI 1.10 to 2.16).

3.7 The ERG noted that the assumptions included in the model could make external validity questionable. For example, it considered that the assumption of a single quit attempt was a limitation that did not allow consideration of the impact of subsequent quit attempts on costs, morbidity or mortality. In addition, the

extrapolation of data on 1-year quit rates to a lifetime is associated with considerable uncertainty surrounding the long-term relapse or abstinence experience of the model cohort. The ERG noted that the use of indirect comparison in the base case was inappropriate given the availability of direct trial evidence. The ERG further identified some computational errors in the calculation of transition probabilities and population calculations. The ERG commented that the method used to convert odds ratios to efficacy rates was not validated and a model constructed around odds ratios would have been more appropriate. The ERG compared the number of life years gained in the model with the results of 2 published analyses and found no substantial differences.

3.8 Full details of all the evidence are in the manufacturer's submission and the ERG report.

Consideration of the evidence

3.9 The Appraisal Committee reviewed the data available on the clinical and cost effectiveness of varenicline, having considered evidence on smoking cessation and the value placed on the benefits of varenicline by people who smoke tobacco products and want to quit, those who represent them, and clinical specialists. It was also mindful of the need to take account of the effective use of NHS resources.

3.10 The Committee considered the clinical effectiveness evidence presented by the manufacturer. It concluded that the evidence from the direct trials and the systematic reviews carried out by the manufacturer and ERG demonstrated that varenicline was superior to NRT and bupropion in achieving continuous abstinence. The Committee heard from the clinical specialists and patient experts that the success rates with varenicline made it a useful addition to the variety of interventions available in smoking cessation, particularly because many smokers need to make multiple quit attempts. The availability of an additional treatment choice was mentioned by clinical specialists and patient experts as beneficial to those having difficulty maintaining abstinence and avoiding relapse because it enabled them to have more control.

3.11 The Committee considered the evidence on the cost effectiveness of varenicline

submitted by the manufacturer. The Committee noted the comments of the ERG that the submission was not transparent and possessed limited external validity. The model included an extrapolation of 1-year clinical data to a lifetime horizon and included an assumption of a single quit attempt. The Committee also noted the computational errors identified by the ERG, and noted that the ERG had expressed concerns about a number of other assumptions in the model, in particular the use of US data for baseline risk and the use of all-cause morbidity instead of other-cause morbidity. Nevertheless, the Committee considered that these concerns were not sufficient to undermine the inference that the use of varenicline in smoking cessation was likely to be a cost-effective use of NHS resources.

3.12 The Committee heard from clinical specialists about the importance of counselling and support in smoking cessation to reinforce the commitment required to quit smoking. It noted that varenicline had been provided alongside counselling and support in the clinical trials. However, the Committee also heard from the clinical specialists that counselling and support are not always used by people aiming to stop smoking and that pharmacotherapies can be effective in the absence of such programmes. The Committee concluded that varenicline should normally be provided in conjunction with counselling and support, but that if such support is refused or is not available, this should not preclude treatment with varenicline.

4 Implementation

4.1 Section 7 of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Constitution and Functions) and the Health and Social Care Information Centre (Functions) Regulations 2013 requires integrated care boards, NHS England and, with respect to their public health functions, local authorities to comply with the recommendations in this evaluation within 3 months of its date of publication.

4.2 The Welsh ministers have issued directions to the NHS in Wales on implementing NICE technology appraisal guidance. When a NICE technology appraisal guidance recommends the use of a drug or treatment, or other technology, the NHS in Wales must usually provide funding and resources for it within 2 months of the first publication of the final draft guidance.

4.3 When NICE recommends a treatment 'as an option', the NHS must make sure it is available within the period set out in the paragraph above. This means that, if the healthcare professional responsible for a patient's care thinks that varenicline is the right treatment for smoking cessation, it should be available for use, in line with NICE's recommendations.

5 Recommendation for further research

5.1 The Committee recommends that research is conducted into the long-term effectiveness of smoking cessation interventions with particular reference to relapse rates after completion of treatment.

6 Appraisal Committee members, public health programme representative and NICE project team

Appraisal Committee members

The Appraisal Committee is a standing advisory committee of NICE. Its members are appointed for a 3-year term. A list of the Committee members who took part in the discussions for this appraisal appears below. The Appraisal Committee meets 3 times a month except in December, when there are no meetings. The Committee membership is split into 3 branches, with a chair and vice chair. Each branch considers its own list of technologies, and ongoing topics are not moved between the branches.

Committee members are asked to declare any interests in the technology to be appraised. If it is considered there is a conflict of interest, the member is excluded from participating further in that appraisal.

The minutes of each Appraisal Committee meeting, which include the names of the members who attended and their declarations of interests, are posted on the NICE website.

Professor David Barnett
Professor of Clinical Pharmacology, University of Leicester

Dr David W Black
Director of Public Health, Derbyshire County PCT

Mr Brian Buckley
Chairman, Incontact

Dr Carol Campbell
Senior Lecturer, University of Teeside

Professor Mike Campbell

Professor of Medical Statistics, University of Sheffield

MsJude Cohen
Manager of Resources and Administration, Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Dr Christine Davey
Senior Researcher, North Yorkshire Alliance R and D Unit

Dr Mike Davies
Consultant Physician, Manchester Royal Infirmary

Mr Richard Devereaux-Phillips
Public Affairs Manager, Medtronic

Dr Rachel A Elliott
Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Manchester

Mrs Eleanor Grey
Lay member

Dr Catherine Jackson
Clinical Lecturer in Primary Care Medicine, Alyth Health Centre

Dr Peter Jackson
Clinical Pharmacologist, University of Sheffield

Ms Rachel Lewis
Practice Development Facilitator, Manchester PCT

Professor Jonathan Michaels
Professor of Vascular Surgery, University of Sheffield

Dr Eugene Milne
Deputy Medical Director, North East Strategic Health Authority

Dr Richard Alexander Nakielny
Consultant Radiologist, Royal Hallamshire Hospital, Sheffield

Dr Katherine Payne
Health Economics Research Fellow, University of Manchester

Professor Andrew Stevens (Chair)
Professor of Public Health, University of Birmingham

Dr Cathryn Thomas
Senior Lecturer, University of Birmingham

Public health programme representative

The following individual, representing the programme development group responsible for developing NICE's public health programme guidance related to this topic, attended the meeting to observe and to contribute as an adviser to the Committee.

- Dr Paul Aveyard, Senior Lecturer, Department of Primary Care and General Practice, University of Birmingham

NICE project team

Each technology appraisal is assigned to a team consisting of 1 or more health technology analysts (who act as technical leads for the appraisal), a technical adviser and a project manager.

Prashanth Kandaswamy
Technical Lead

Louise Longworth
Technical Adviser

Chris Feinmann
Project Manager

Sources of evidence considered by the Committee

The evidence review group (ERG) report for this appraisal was prepared by the School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR):

- D Hind, P Tappenden, J Peters, K Kenjegalieva. Varenicline for smoking cessation: a single technology appraisal(March 2007).

The following organisations accepted the invitation to participate in this appraisal. They were invited to comment on the draft scope. Companies or sponsors were also invited to make written submissions. Professional or specialist, and patient or carer groups, gave their expert views on varenicline by providing a written statement to the Committee. Companies or sponsors, and professional or specialist, and patient or carer groups, have the opportunity to appeal against the final appraisal determination.

Companies or sponsors:

- Pfizer Ltd

Professional or specialist, and patient or carer groups:

- Action Heart
- British Heart Foundation
- Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT
- Cancer Research UK
- General Practice Airways Group
- Macmillan Cancer Relief
- National Lung Cancer Forum for Nurses
- Primary Care Cardiovascular Society
- Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation
- Royal College of Nursing
- Royal College of Physicians
- Welsh Assembly Government

Commentator organisations (did not provide written evidence and without the right of appeal):

- British National Formulary
- British Society for Cardiovascular Research
- Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for Northern Ireland
- GlaxoSmithKline (Bupropion)
- GlaxoSmithKline Consumer Healthcare (Nicotine)
- Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency (MHRA)
- National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment
- NHS Quality Improvement Scotland
- School of Health and Related Research (ScHARR), University of Sheffield

The following individuals were selected from clinical specialist and patient advocate nominations from the professional or specialist, and patient or carer groups. They gave their expert personal view on varenicline by providing written evidence to the Committee.

- Dr Katherine Willmer, Consultant Cardiologist, nominated by the British Cardiovascular Society – clinical specialist
- Mrs Christine Owens, Head of Tobacco Control of and nominated by the Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation – patient expert
- Mr David Geldard, President, Heart Care Partnership (UK), nominated by the British Cardiovascular Society – patient expert

Changes after publication

March 2014: Implementation section updated to clarify that varenicline is recommended as an option for smoking cessation.

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