Long term and short term oral anticoagulation treatments were equivalent for venous thromboembolism


QUESTION: In patients with proximal deep venous thrombosis (PDVT) or pulmonary embolism, or both, or isolated calf deep venous thrombosis (CDVT), is long term treatment better than short term treatment with oral anticoagulants for preventing recurrences and bleeding complications?

Design
Randomised (allocation concealed*), unblinded,* controlled trial with 15 months of follow up.

Setting
France.

Patients
736 patients (mean age 50 y, 53% women) who had symptomatic PDVT or pulmonary embolism, or both, or symptomatic CDVT confirmed by objective diagnostic tests. Exclusion criteria included pregnancy, breast feeding, vena cava filter implantation, surgical thrombectomy, free-floating thrombus in the inferior vena cava, active cancer or malignant haematological disease, or a previous venous thromboembolism. 97% of patients completed the study.

Intervention
375 patients (270 with PDVT or pulmonary embolism, or both, and 105 with CDVT) were allocated to short term (3 mo for PDVT—pulmonary embolism, 6 wk for CDVT) oral anticoagulant treatment, and 361 patients (269 with PDVT or pulmonary embolism, or both, and 92 with CDVT) were allocated to long term (6 mo for PDVT—pulmonary embolism, 12 wk for CDVT) treatment with oral anticoagulants. Fluindione was used for oral anticoagulation with dose adjustments to maintain an international normalised ratio of 2.0 to 3.0.

Main outcome measures
Incidence of recurrent venous thromboembolism and haemorrhage (major, minor, or fatal).

Main result
Intention to treat analyses showed that the treatment groups did not differ for incidence rates of recurrent venous thromboembolism and haemorrhage (table).

Conclusions
In patients with proximal deep venous thrombosis or pulmonary embolism, or both, 6 months is equivalent to 3 months of treatment with anticoagulants for preventing recurrences and bleeding complications. Similarly, in patients with calf deep venous thrombosis, 6 weeks is equivalent to 12 weeks of treatment with oral anticoagulants.

*See glossary.
3 months and 1 year of oral anticoagulant treatment were equivalent for idiopathic proximal deep venous thrombosis


QUESTION: In patients who have had a first episode of idiopathic proximal deep venous thrombosis, what is the long term effectiveness of extending to 1 year the initial 3 month course of oral anticoagulant treatment?

Design
Randomised (unclear allocation concealment*), unblinded,* controlled trial with ≥ 2 years of follow up.

Setting
10 study centres in Italy.

Patients
267 patients (mean age 67 y, 58% men) who had a first episode of symptomatic idiopathic proximal deep venous thrombosis confirmed by compression ultrasonography or venography, and had completed 3 uninterrupted months of oral anticoagulant treatment without a recurrence of thromboembolism or bleeding. Exclusion criteria included anticoagulant treatment for reasons other than venous thromboembolism, major psychiatric disorders, life expectancy < 2 years, and inability to return for follow up. 90% of patients completed the study.

Intervention
After 3 months of treatment with warfarin (97% of patients) or acenocoumarol, 133 patients were allocated to discontinue (3 mo treatment group) and 133 patients to continue (1 y treatment group) oral anticoagulant treatment for 9 additional months. The dose of the oral anticoagulant was adjusted to maintain an international normalised ratio of 2.0 to 3.0.

Main outcome measures
The primary outcome was recurrent deep venous thrombosis. Secondary outcomes were major bleeding and all-cause mortality.

Main results
At ≥ 2 years, intention to treat analyses showed that the groups did not differ for incidence rates of recurrent deep venous thrombosis, major bleeding, and all-cause mortality (Table). The study had an 80% power to detect a 50% reduction in the risk of recurrence at the 5% level of significance.

Conclusion
In patients who had a first episode of idiopathic proximal deep venous thrombosis, 3 months was equivalent to 1 year of oral anticoagulant treatment in preventing recurrences at ≥ 2 years.

*See glossary.

1 year v 3 months’ treatment with oral anticoagulants for proximal deep venous thrombosis†

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes at ≥ 2 years</th>
<th>1 year treatment</th>
<th>3 months’ treatment</th>
<th>RRR (95% CI)</th>
<th>NNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recurrence</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>1% (~72 to 43)</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All-cause mortality</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>1% (~165 to 63)</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major bleeding</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>99% (~57 to 817)</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†Abbreviations defined in glossary; RRR, RRI, NNT, NNH, and CI calculated from data in article.

COMMENTARY—continued from previous page

In a mix of patients with provoked and unprovoked VTE, Pinede et al found the risk for recurrent VTE to be similar after completing 3 and 6 months of treatment. In patients with a first episode of unprovoked deep venous thrombosis, Agnelli et al found a similar risk for recurrent VTE after completing 3 months and 12 months of treatment. In the latter study, this risk was only about 5% per year, much lower than the 25% observed after 3 months of treatment in a similarly defined patient population.1

A consistent finding across studies is that 3 months of anticoagulant treatment is adequate for patients with VTE that has been provoked by a major transient risk factor. The subsequent risk for recurrence is low (< 5% per year); however, uncertainty exists when the risk for recurrence after an unprovoked VTE is as low as after 3 months of treatment as it is after 6 months. Although the 2 new studies strongly suggest that 3 months of treatment achieves as low a subsequent risk for recurrent VTE as 6 or 12 months of treatment, neither study had the power to establish this definitively. On the basis (mostly) of the results of our own study,1 which is representative of our patient population, I will continue to recommend a minimum of 6 months of anticoagulant treatment for a first unprovoked episode of VTE, provided patients do not have a high risk for bleeding. Current evidence suggests that patients with unprovoked VTE who have been treated for 6 months or longer have a risk for recurrent VTE of about 10% during the year after anticoagulant treatment is stopped. Therefore, once patients have successfully completed 6 months of treatment, I encourage them to remain on long term treatment provided they have a low risk for bleeding and do not find treatment a burden.

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