ANTIPLATELET THERAPY

Is long-term clopidogrel therapy necessary after DES implantation?

Aspirin monotherapy might be as effective as dual aspirin and clopidogrel therapy in protecting patients from thrombotic events after the first year following implantation of drug-eluting stents, suggest Seung-Jung Park and colleagues in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

The long-term risks of drug-eluting stents became evident in 2006, Park explains, “[owing] to increased rate of late stent thrombosis, late mortality or [late] myocardial infarction.” The FDA now recommends dual clopidogrel and aspirin therapy for at least 12 months after implantation of these stents. The risk-to-benefit ratio of long-term clopidogrel use in these patients has not, however, been formally assessed.

“In our study, we randomly assigned patients who received drug-eluting stents and [had been] free of major adverse cardiovascular [or cerebrovascular] events

or major bleeding for at least 12 months to receive [either] dual antiplatelet therapy or aspirin monotherapy,” Park explains. A total of 2,701 patients from 22 cardiac centres in South Korea were followed for 2 years (median 19.2 months).

Long-term use of clopidogrel did not significantly reduce the cumulative risk of the primary end point—a composite of myocardial infarction and death from cardiac causes—when compared with aspirin monotherapy (1.8% or 1.2% risk for each therapy, respectively). “In addition, the rates of some composite end points [that include] all-cause or cardiac death, myocardial infarction, or stroke were slightly higher [among] the dual-therapy group than [among the] aspirin monotherapy group,” adds Park, although these increases were not significant.

Further research is needed to determine the optimal duration of clopidogrel therapy

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for patients who receive drug-eluting stents. Park and colleagues plan to continue to follow up the participants of the study. “We should [also] wait [for the results of] larger, longer-term randomized controlled trials, such as [the] DAPT trial,” adds Park.

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