VIRAL HEPATITIS

Eltrombopag is useful for patients with HCV and thrombocytopenia

Eltrombopag has been found to increase platelet numbers in patients with HCV infection and thrombocytopenia so that these patients can initiate and maintain antiviral therapy with ribavirin and PEG-IFN.

Thrombocytopenia is a fairly common complication in patients with HCV infection and associated chronic liver disease, and can be aggravated by antiviral treatment with ribavirin and PEG-IFN. Thus, patients with platelet counts <100,000/ μ l might be ineligible or marginal candidates for this therapy.

The ENABLE-1 and ENABLE-2 trials were multicentre, phase III, randomized controlled studies investigating the ability of eltrombopag to increase platelet numbers to levels high enough for PEG-IFN and ribavirin treatment to be initiated and maintained in patients with HCV infection and thrombocytopenia.

715 patients were included in ENABLE-1, and 805 were included in ENABLE-2. 95% of patients from ENABLE-1 and 94% from ENABLE-2 reached the predefined minimal threshold platelet counts for initiation of PEG-IFN and ribavirin therapy. More patients who received eltrombopag than placebo then went on to achieve a sustained virological response.

The authors conclude by stating that “In patients with cirrhosis and [thrombocytopenia], eltrombopag should be evaluated in the setting of newer treatment regimens with triple therapies or quadruple therapies”.

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Original article Afdhal, N. H. *et al.* Eltrombopag increases platelet numbers in thrombocytopenic patients with HCV infection and cirrhosis, allowing for effective antiviral therapy. *Gastroenterology* doi:10.1053/j.gastro.2013.10.012