Health Technology Assessment 2008; Vol. 12: No. 20

Systematic review and economic analysis of the comparative effectiveness of different inhaled corticosteroids and their usage with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under the age of 12 years

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May 2008

Health Technology Assessment
NHS R&D HTA Programme
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Declared competing interests of authors: K Stein is a member of the Editorial Board for *Health Technology Assessment* but was not involved in the editorial process for this report

Published May 2008

This report should be referenced as follows:

Main C, Shepherd J, Anderson R, Rogers G, Thompson-Coon J, Liu Z, *et al*. Systematic review and economic analysis of the comparative effectiveness of different inhaled corticosteroids and their usage with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under the age of 12 years. *Health Technol Assess* 2008;**12**(20).

Health Technology Assessment is indexed and abstracted in *Index Medicus*/MEDLINE, *Excerpta Medica*/EMBASE and *Science Citation Index Expanded (SciSearch®)* and *Current Contents®*/Clinical Medicine.

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The research reported in this monograph was commissioned and funded by the HTA Programme on behalf of NICE as project number 04/30/02. The protocol was agreed in April 2006. The assessment report began editorial review in May 2007 and was accepted for publication in September 2007. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors' report and would like to thank the referees for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the HTA Programme or the Department of Health.

ISSN 1366-5278

Published by Gray Publishing, Tunbridge Wells, Kent, on behalf of NCCHTA.
Printed on acid-free paper in the UK by St Edmundsbury Press Ltd, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

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Abstract

Systematic review and economic analysis of the comparative effectiveness of different inhaled corticosteroids and their usage with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under the age of 12 years

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Objectives: To assess the clinical and cost-effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids (ICS) alone and ICS used in combination with a long-acting beta$_2$ agonist (LABA) in the treatment of chronic asthma in children aged under 12 years.

Data sources: Major electronic bibliographic databases, e.g. MEDLINE and EMBASE, were searched up to February/March 2006 (and updated again in October 2006).

Review methods: A systematic review of clinical and cost-effectiveness studies and economic analyses were carried out. A flexible framework was used to allow different types of economic analyses as appropriate, with either a cost comparison or cost–consequence comparison conducted.

Results: Of 5175 records identified through systematic literature searching, 34 records describing 25 studies were included (16 were fully published randomised controlled trials, six were systematic reviews, and three were post-2004 conference abstracts). The most frequently reported relevant outcomes in the 16 RCTs were peak expiratory flow rate (13 trials), FEV_1 (13 trials), symptoms (13 trials), adverse events or exacerbations (13 trials), use of rescue medication (12 trials), markers of adrenal function (e.g. blood or urine cortisol concentrations) (13 trials), height and/or growth rate (seven trials) and markers of bone metabolism (two trials). In the trials that compared low-dose ICS versus ICS and high-dose ICS versus ICS, no consistent significant differences or patterns in differential treatment effect among the outcomes were evident. Where differences were statistically significant at high doses, such as for lung function and growth, they favoured formoterol fumarate (FF), but this was generally in studies that did not compare the ICS at the accepted clinically equivalent doses. Differences between the drugs in impact on adrenal suppression were only significant in two studies. At doses of 200, 400 and 800 μg/day, beclometasone dipropionate (BDP) appears to be the current cheapest ICS product both with the inclusion and exclusion of chlorofluorocarbon (CFC)-propelled products. In the trials comparing ICS at a higher dose with ICS and LABA in combination, most outcomes favoured the combined inhaler. Only the combination inhaler, Seretide Evohaler, is slightly cheaper than the weighted mean cost of all types of ICS at increased dose except BDP 400 μg/day (including CFC-propelled products). Both the combination inhalers, Seretide Accuhaler and Symbicort Turbohaler, are more expensive than the weighted mean cost for all types of ICS at a two-fold increased dose. Compared with the lowest cost preparation for each ICS drug, all the combination inhalers are always more expensive than the ICS products at increased dose.

Conclusions: The limited evidence available indicates that there are no consistent significant differences in effectiveness between the three ICS licensed for use in children at either low or high dose. BDP CFC-propelled products are often the cheapest ICS currently available at both low and high dose, and may remain so even when CFC-propelled products are

excluded. Exclusion of CFC-propelled products increases the mean annual cost of all budesonide (BUD) and BDP, while the overall cost differences between the comparators diminish. There is very limited evidence available for the efficacy and safety of ICS and LABAs in children. From this limited evidence, there appear to be no significant clinical differences in effects between the use of a combination inhaler versus the same drugs in separate inhalers. There is a lack of evidence comparing ICS at a higher dose with ICS and LABA in combination and comparing the combination products with each other. In the absence of any evidence concerning the effectiveness of ICS at higher dose with ICS and LABA, a cost–consequence analysis gives mixed results. There are potential cost savings with the use of combination inhalers compared to separate inhalers. At present prices, the BUD/FF combination is more expensive than those containing FP/SAL, but it is not known whether there are clinically significant differences between them.

A scoping review is required to assess the requirements for additional primary research on the clinical effectiveness of treatment for asthma in children under 5 years old. Such a review could also usefully include all treatment options, pharmacological and non-pharmacological, for asthma. A direct head-to-head trial that compares the two combination therapies of FP/SAL and BUD/FF is warranted, and it is important to assess whether the addition of a LABA to a lower dose of ICS could potentially be as effective as an increased dose of ICS alone, but also be steroid sparing. There is also a need for the long-term adverse events associated with ICS use to be assessed systematically. Future trials of treatment for chronic asthma in children should aim to standardise further the way in which outcome measures are defined. There should be a greater focus on patient-centred outcomes to provide a more meaningful estimation of the impact of treatment on asthma control. Methods of reporting also require standardisation.

Contents

Glossary and list of abbreviations

Technical terms and abbreviations are used throughout this report. The meaning is usually clear from the context, but a glossary is provided for the non-specialist reader. In some cases, usage differs in the literature, but the term has a constant meaning throughout this review.

Glossary

Chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) A propellant used in pressured metered dose inhalers. Currently being replaced by hydrofluoroalkanes (HFA) propellants.

Cortisol A corticosteroid hormone that is involved in the response to stress; it increases blood pressure and blood sugar levels and suppresses the immune system.

***Ex*-actuator** Used in reference to drug delivery. The content per actuation which is reflected in the labelled strength of the drug. *Ex*-actuator means metered – the amount of drug that is delivered from the mouthpiece to the patient.

***Ex*-valve** Used in reference to drug delivery. The content per actuation which is reflected in the labelled strength of the drug. *Ex*-valve means metered – the amount of drug delivered from the inhaler into the mouthpiece.

Forced expiratory volume (FEV_1) The volume of air exhaled in the second of forced blowing into a spirometer.

Forced vital capacity (FVC) The total amount of air that a person can forcibly blow out after full inspiration, measured in litres.

Hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal axis (HPA axis) A major part of the neuroendocrine system that controls reactions to stress and has important functions in regulating various body processes such as digestion, the immune system and energy usage.

Hydrofluoroalkane (HFA) A propellant used in pressured metered dose inhalers. Replacement for chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) propellant.

I^2 A measure used to quantify heterogeneity in a meta-analysis. It describes the percentage of the variability in effect estimates that is due to heterogeneity rather than sampling error (chance). A value greater than 50% may be considered to represent substantial heterogeneity.

Peak expiratory flow rate The maximum rate at which air is expired from the lungs when blowing into a peak flow meter or spirometer.

PC20 The provocative concentration of methacholine to induce a 20% decline in FEV_1.

PD20 A value obtained in methacholine challenge testing to indicate severity of asthma.

Spacer Device attached to an inhaler to maximise the delivery of the drug to the lungs. A spacer consists of a container, usually in two halves that fit together. One end fits to a mouth-piece or a face-mask (e.g. for young children). The other end fits to the inhaler.

Spirometry A pulmonary function test, measuring lung function.

List of abbreviations

A&E	Accident and Emergency
ACQ-5	Asthma Control Questionnaire
AE	adverse event
AMD	adjustable maintenance dose
ANCOVA	analysis of covariance
AQLQ	Asthma Quality of Life Questionnaire
AZ	AstraZeneca
BDP	beclometasone dipropionate
BMD	bone mineral density
BNF	British National Formulary
BTS	British Thoracic Society
BUD	budesonide
CEA	cost-effectiveness analysis
CFC	chlorofluorocarbon
CI	confidence interval
CMA	cost minimisation analysis
COPD	chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder
CRD	Centre for Reviews and Dissemination
CUA	cost–utility analysis
DPI	dry powder inhaler
EMEA	European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products
FD	fixed dose
FDA	Food and Drug Administration
$FEF_{25–75\%}$	forced expiratory flow
FEV_1	forced expiratory volume in 1 second
FF	formoterol fumarate
FP	fluticasone propionate
FVC	forced vital capacity
GINA	Global Initiative for Asthma
GSK	GlaxoSmithKline
HFA	hydrofluoroalkane
HPA	hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal
HRQoL	health-related quality of life
ICER	incremental cost-effectiveness ratio
ICS	inhaled corticosteroid (e.g. BUD)
ITT	intention-to-treat
LABA	long-acting $beta_2$ agonist (e.g. salmeterol or formoterol)
MDI	metered-dose inhaler
MHRA	Medicines and Health Care Products Regulatory Agency
NICE	National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence
OCS	oral corticosteroid
OR	odds ratio
PAHOM	Paediatric Asthma Health Outcome Measure
PCA	Prescribing Cost Analysis
PEF	peak expiratory flow rate
pMDI	pressured metered-dose inhaler
PP	per protocol

continued

List of abbreviations *continued*

PSA	probabilistic sensitivity analysis
PSC	posterior subcapsular cataract
PSS	Personal Social Services
QALY	quality-adjusted life-year
RCT	randomised controlled trial
RD	risk difference
RR	relative risk
RSV	respiratory syncytial virus
SABA	short-acting beta$_2$ agonist (e.g. salbutamol or terbutaline)
SAL	salmeterol
SD	standard deviation
SE	standard error
SEM	standard error of the mean
SFD	symptom-free day
SFN	symptom-free night
SIGN	Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network
SMART	Salmeterol Multicentre Asthma Research Trial
SMD	standardised mean difference
SNS	Salmeterol Nationwide Surveillance
TCM	total cortisol metabolites
WMD	weighted mean difference

All abbreviations that have been used in this report are listed here unless the abbreviation is well known (e.g. NHS), or it has been used only once, or it is a non-standard abbreviation used only in figures/tables/appendices in which case the abbreviation is defined in the figure legend or at the end of the table.

Executive summary

Current asthma management

Various strategies are used in the prevention and management of asthma. Pharmacological management includes, among other drugs, inhaled corticosteroids (ICS) and short- and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists (SABAs/LABAs). Both ICS and LABAs are inhaled controller medications that need to be taken on a long-term daily basis for maximum symptom control. The medications can be delivered via a number of different types of inhaler devices; these differ in the efficiency with which they deliver the drug to the lower respiratory tract.

There are currently three ICS available as licensed preparations for children aged under 12 years: beclometasone dipropionate (BDP), budesonide (BUD) and fluticasone propionate (FP). Two of the ICS are available as licensed preparations in combination with LABA: FP used in combination with salmeterol (SAL) and BUD used in combination with formoterol fumarate (FF).

Objectives

The aims of this health technology assessment are:

- to identify, appraise and synthesise, where appropriate, the current evidence base on the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of ICS alone and ICS used in combination with a LABA in the treatment of chronic asthma in children aged under 12 years
- to identify the costs associated with the different treatments
- to provide estimates of cost-effectiveness, where possible, of the different treatment options.

An accompanying health technology assessment has been conducted in adults and children over 12 years.

Methods

The assessment was conducted within the context of the British Thoracic Society (BTS)/Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) Guideline on the management of asthma.

The assessment comprises a systematic review of clinical and cost-effectiveness studies and economic analyses.

For the assessment of clinical effectiveness, a literature search was conducted on a number of electronic bibliographic databases (e.g. MEDLINE, Cochrane CENTRAL and EMBASE) up to February/March 2006 (and updated again in October 2006). Systematic reviews and randomised controlled trials (RCTs) were included. Only trials testing different drugs using the same inhaler device/propellant were included. Therefore, trials testing, for example, BDP via a pressurised metered dose inhaler (pMDI) versus BUD via a dry powder inhaler (DPI) were excluded, as were trials testing, for example, BDP via hydrofluoroalkane (HFA)-propelled pMDI versus BUD via chlorofluorocarbon (CFC)-propelled pMDI. The scope of the review was to consider the effectiveness of the inhaled steroids, as opposed to their delivery devices. Some clinical trials were specifically designed to evaluate device effects using clinically inequivalent doses. These were therefore excluded to reduce the likelihood of confounding.

A flexible framework was used to allow different types of economic analyses and a cost comparison or a cost–consequence comparison was conducted for each review question identified.

Results

Clinical effectiveness review

Of 5175 records identified through systematic literature searching, 34 records describing 25 studies were included. Of these, 16 were fully published RCTs, six were systematic reviews, and three were post-2004 conference abstracts.

Noticeably absent from the evidence base are studies in children and infants aged under 4 years.

The most frequently reported relevant outcomes in the 16 RCTs were PEF (13 trials), FEV_1 (13 trials), symptoms (13 trials), adverse events or exacerbations (13 trials), use of rescue medication (12 trials), markers of adrenal function (e.g. blood

or urine cortisol concentrations) (13 trials), height and/or growth rate (seven trials) and markers of bone metabolism (two trials). The detail of reporting outcomes varied considerably among the studies.

ICS versus ICS

Five RCTs were identified that compared the three ICS with each other at low doses (200–400 µg BDP/day or equivalent) and seven comparing them at high doses (800–2000 µg BDP/day or equivalent). No consistent significant differences or patterns in differential treatment effect among the outcomes were evident when single ICS were compared with each other at either low or high doses at the accepted clinically equivalent doses. Where differences were statistically significant at high doses, such as for lung function [e.g. forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV_1) and growth], they favoured FP, but this was generally in studies that did not compare the ICS at the accepted clinically equivalent doses. Differences between the drugs in impact on adrenal suppression were only significant in two studies. Occurrence of adverse events appeared similar.

ICS versus ICS/LABA

Only one trial was identified that compared ICS at a higher dose with ICS and LABA in combination. It included a relatively small proportion (~12%) of children and reported only growth rate and adrenal function for the child cohort. Growth rate significantly favoured the combination inhaler (FP/SAL) whereas no significant difference in adrenal function between ICS monotherapy (FP) and the combination inhaler was observed.

The overall trial results (including adults) significantly favoured combination therapy in prolonging the time to first severe and mild exacerbation compared with ICS alone. Furthermore, combination treatment was significantly associated with reduced reliever medication use, improvements in measures of lung function and the number of night-time awakenings relative to monotherapy.

Two large, multi-centre trials were identified that compared ICS at the same dose with ICS and LABA in combination. In both trials most outcomes numerically favoured the combination inhaler (either FP/SAL compared against FP or BUD/FF compared against BUD). However, in one of the studies (FP/SAL), it is unclear whether any of the differences were statistically significant, and in the other study (BUD/FF) only lung function outcomes differed significantly.

ICS/LABA versus ICS/LABA

Only one trial was identified that compared combination inhalers with the same drugs delivered in separate inhalers. There were no statistically significant differences in measures of lung function between the two treatment regimens. The mean difference in the morning PEF was within a defined range for clinical equivalence.

No trials have so far been conducted in children to compare the clinical effectiveness of the two combination inhalers.

Economic analysis

Results

ICS versus ICS

A cost comparison was undertaken to compare the costs of ICS at the starting low dose of 200 µg/day, the maximum low dose of 400 µg/day and the assumed median 'high-level' daily dose of 800 µg/day (all BDP–CFC equivalent doses).

At daily doses of 200 µg (BDP–CFC equivalent)/day, CFC-propelled BDP appears to be the current cheapest ICS product. If CFC-propelled products are excluded from the available products, BDP is still usually the cheapest but at a higher annual cost. At doses of 400 µg/day, BDP remains the cheapest ICS product available both with the inclusion and exclusion of CFC-propelled products, although the cost differences between products are smaller when CFC-propelled products are excluded.

On average, at doses of 800 µg (BDP–CFC equivalent)/day, although BDP is the current cheapest ICS product with both the inclusion and exclusion of CFC-propelled products, it is only slightly cheaper than BUD or FP. However, although the use of weighted averages provides a useful way to compare the mean annual cost between the different ICS, at all dose levels it disguises the often large cost differences between the different preparations of each ICS.

ICS versus ICS/LABA

Only the combination inhaler, Seretide Evohaler, is slightly cheaper than the weighted mean cost of all types of ICS at increased dose except BDP 400 µg/day (including CFC-propelled products). Both the combination inhalers, Seretide Accuhaler and Symbicort Turbohaler, are more expensive than the weighted mean cost for all types of ICS at a two-fold increased dose. Compared with the lowest cost preparation for each ICS drug, all the combination inhalers are always more expensive than the ICS products at increased dose.

ICS/LABA versus ICS/LABA
Taking either FP in combination with SAL (Seretide Evohaler or Seretide Accuhaler) or BUD in combination with FF (Symbicort Turbohaler) is cheaper than taking the relevant ingredient drugs in separate inhalers.

Based on a comparison of the costs only, BUD in combination with FF (Symbicort Turbohaler) is more expensive than both the FP/SAL (Seretide Evohaler or Seretide Accuhaler) combination drugs currently available.

Discussion

Limitations of the evidence base

This review identified very few trials including children under the age of 12 years and none including children under the age of 5 years. The methodological quality of the included RCTs varied considerably, and there was considerable variation in the way in which outcomes were defined, measured and reported across the included trials. This variety of definitions makes it difficult to compare the therapeutic activity of the different interventions between the trials, and in this instance makes combining studies in a meta-analysis inappropriate.

The aim of the trials varied considerably, with some primarily assessing safety and others primarily evaluating efficacy. The included trials also varied in treatment duration from around 6 weeks to 20 months, with the majority lasting 12 weeks. These trials therefore do not adequately capture the longer term effects of ICS and LABA therapy, particularly long-term adverse events and the impact on growth. Additionally, in the majority of trials it was not clear what constituted the minimum clinically significant change for many of the reported outcomes, such as lung function, symptoms or exacerbations.

The two other issues that have not formally been assessed in this report are considerations of the type of inhaler device and concordance, factors that are inextricably linked. It is well recognised that a large proportion of the asthmatic population has difficulty in using particular inhaler devices. This difficulty relates particularly to pMDIs and to a less extent to DPIs. Both require the ability to coordinate the inhalation with activation of the device. For paediatric populations, the use of a pMDI is usually combined with a large volume spacer. However, within the context of a clinical trial, only those patients who are able to use the type of device under evaluation effectively will be eligible for inclusion in the trial. Evidence for the effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids and beta$_2$ agonists for asthma from clinical trials should therefore be considered carefully for its generalisability to the typical population with asthma, as opposed to the subgroup of patients selected for their ability to use the inhaler effectively. Furthermore, given the probable device-related variations in both compliance with correct inhaler technique and adherence to recommended daily doses, the rate of concordance with treatment regimens is likely to be considerably higher in clinical trials than in routine practice.

ICS versus ICS

When evaluated in pair-wise comparisons, there were few statistically significant differences between the three ICS comparators at both low and high dose. However, although there were no clear significant differences in treatment effects between the comparators, they cannot necessarily be assumed to be equivalent. Rather, there is a lack of evidence of differential effectiveness from the trial evidence available, rather than evidence of equivalence.

At all doses of ICS licensed for use in children, BDP, both including and excluding CFC-propelled products, is the cheapest ICS currently available. When non-CFC-propelled products only are considered, the mean annual cost of ICS therapy increases for all three ICS, but the overall cost differences between the drugs diminish.

ICS versus ICS/LABA

There is very limited evidence available for the comparative efficacy and safety of ICS and LABAs in children. Where significant differences between ICS compared with ICS and LABA have been identified, they have favoured the latter. Based on costs only, the extra annual cost of combination therapy versus an increased dose of ICS alone varies enormously, depending on the exact ICS preparation used. On the whole, only Seretide Evohaler is slightly cheaper than the weighted mean cost of all types of ICS, except BDP. However, the combination inhalers are always more expensive than the lowest cost preparation of each ICS drug at increased dose.

Use of a combination inhaler is always cheaper than taking the same ingredient drugs in separate inhalers. At the present time, the combination inhaler containing FP/SAL is cheaper than combinations containing BUD/FF. However, these

combination products have not been compared in direct head-to-head trials, and therefore differences in clinical effects cannot be ruled out.

Conclusions

The limited evidence available indicates that there are no consistent significant differences in effectiveness between the three ICS licensed for use in children at either low or high dose. BDP CFC-propelled products are often the cheapest ICS currently available at both low and high dose, and may remain so even when CFC-propelled products are excluded. Exclusion of CFC-propelled products increases the mean annual cost of all BUD and BDP, while the overall cost differences between the comparators diminish.

There is very limited evidence available for the efficacy and safety of ICS and LABAs in children. From this limited evidence, there appear to be no significant clinical differences in effects between the use of a combination inhaler versus the same drugs in separate inhalers. There is a lack of evidence comparing ICS at a higher dose with ICS and LABA in combination and comparing the combination products with each other.

In the absence of any evidence concerning the effectiveness of ICS at higher dose with ICS and LABA, a cost–consequence analysis gives mixed results.

There are potential cost savings to the NHS with the use of combination inhalers compared to separate inhalers. At present prices, the BUD/FF combination is more expensive than those containing FP/SAL, but it is not known whether there are clinically significant differences between them.

Research recommendations

A scoping review is required to assess the requirements for additional primary research on the clinical effectiveness of treatment for asthma in children under 5 years old. Such a review could also usefully include all treatment options, pharmacological and non-pharmacological, for asthma.

There is currently no trial evidence available to inform the relative effectiveness of the two combination inhalers of FP/SAL and BUD/FF within a paediatric population. The results of the current assessment suggest that for FP/SAL there are no significant differences in effectiveness in terms of whether the drugs are delivered in a single inhaler or concurrently in two separate inhalers. However, as ease of treatment regimen may potentially affect concordance then a direct head-to-head trial that compares the two combination therapies of FP/SAL and BUD/FF is warranted.

Given the chronic nature of asthma and that treatment may be necessary on a long-term basis from childhood, it is important to assess whether the addition of a LABA to a lower dose of ICS could potentially be as effective as an increased dose of ICS alone, but also be steroid sparing.

There is a need for the long-term adverse events associated with ICS use to be assessed systematically. Initial searches undertaken for this assessment indicate that there are at present no good-quality systematic reviews available that have assessed all potential long-term adverse events associated with the three different ICS comparators. Future reviews should aim to examine studies of longer term follow-up and use appropriate data sources such as cohort and case–control studies and registry data where available.

Future trials of treatment for chronic asthma in children should aim to standardise further the way in which outcome measures are defined. There should be a greater focus on patient-centred outcomes such as HRQoL and symptoms. This will provide a more meaningful estimation of the impact of treatment on asthma control. Methods of reporting also require standardisation.

Chapter 1
Background

Natural history of asthma

Definition

Asthma is a chronic inflammatory disorder of the airways, leading to airway narrowing from both inflammatory processes and constriction of the smooth muscle in airway walls (bronchoconstriction). Another characteristic of the pathology of the disease is a process known as remodelling. This consists of mucus gland and smooth muscle hypertrophy and increased collagen deposition in airway walls. Asthma is characterised by widespread, variable airflow obstruction and increased responsiveness of the airways to various stimuli. Resulting symptoms include recurring episodes of wheezing, breathlessness, chest tightness and coughing, particularly at night or in the early morning. Common risk factors include respiratory (viral) infections, allergens such as pollens, moulds, animal fur and house dust mite, cold and exercise.[1,2]

Diagnosis

There is no confirmatory diagnostic test or investigation for asthma. It is usually diagnosed on the basis of symptoms (wheeze, shortness of breath, chest tightness and cough) together with objective tests of lung function such as peak expiratory flow rate (PEF) and forced expiratory volume in 1 second (FEV_1). Typical asthma symptoms tend to be variable, intermittent, worse at night and provoked by triggers (e.g. allergens or exercise). Variability of PEF and FEV_1, either spontaneously over time or in response to therapy, is a characteristic feature of asthma which is also often used in diagnosis.[1]

Diagnosis of asthma in young children is difficult. Objective measurements of lung function are often difficult to obtain and may be unreliable, particularly in very young children. The Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA) Pocket Guide for Asthma Management in Children suggests that lung function measurement using either FEV_1 or PEF can greatly enhance diagnostic confidence in those over 5 years of age.[3] The British Thoracic Society/Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (BTS/SIGN) Guideline[1] recommends that the diagnosis of asthma in young children is based on the presence of key features and careful consideration of alternative diagnoses (e.g. cystic fibrosis, developmental anomaly, reflux, recurrent milk aspiration and tuberculosis), the assessment of potential co-morbidities and the response to trials of treatment.

Asthma severity

Assessing asthma severity is difficult and depends on the level of treatment. GINA classifies asthma severity as intermittent or persistently mild, moderate or severe based on combined assessments of symptoms and lung function (*Table 1*) for children over 5 years of age. Severity

TABLE 1 *GINA classification of asthma severity in children over 5 years of age*

Step	Symptoms/day	Symptoms/night	PEF or FEV_1 variability (%)
STEP 1 Intermittent	<once per week Asymptomatic and normal PEF between exacerbations	<2 times per month	⩾80 <20
STEP 2 Mild persistent	>once per week but <once per day Exacerbations may affect activity	>2 times per month	⩾80 20–30
STEP 3 Moderate persistent	Daily Exacerbations affect activity	>once per week	60–80 >30
STEP 4 Severe persistent	Continuous Limited physical activity	Frequent	<60 >30

Source: *Pocket Guide for Asthma Management and Prevention in Children*.[3]

varies amongst individuals, does not necessarily correlate with the frequency or persistence of symptoms and can change in one individual over time. When an individual is already on treatment, the classification of severity is based on the clinical features present and the daily medication regimen that the individual is currently on. Under this classification, the presence of one of the features of severity is sufficient to place an individual in that category. Individuals at any level of severity can have severe exacerbations.[3]

A cross-sectional study of 12,203 patients from 393 general practices in the UK, performed by Neville and colleagues in 1994–5, reported that the majority of individuals with asthma in the UK are treated at Steps 1 and 2 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline (*Figure 1*).[4] This appears particularly true for children, in whom only around 10% were treated at Steps 4 and 5 of the Guideline, indicating more severe disease.

Asthma exacerbations

There is no generally accepted definition of an exacerbation, although they can be regarded as "a sustained worsening of the individual's condition from the stable state and beyond normal day-to-day variations in symptoms, that is acute in onset and necessitates a change in regular medication".[5] Asthma exacerbations are characterised by a progressive increase in shortness of breath, cough, wheeze or chest tightness or a combination of these symptoms, accompanied by a decrease in PEF. Exacerbations can be triggered by a variety of stimuli, including allergens, viral infections, pollutants and drugs. Exacerbations are variable in severity and frequency both between individuals and within the same individual over time, and appropriate treatment will reflect both the severity and the frequency of exacerbations. Minor exacerbations may be treated by the individual or their family using high doses of inhaled SABAs or an increased dose of ICS, although sometimes a short course of systemic corticosteroids or other treatments are also needed.[1] More severe exacerbations, although less common, can potentially be life-threatening, and may require hospitalisation, treatment and monitoring until symptoms have stabilised.

Asthma control

The aims of the pharmacological management of asthma are the control of symptoms, including nocturnal symptoms and exercise-induced asthma, prevention of exacerbations and the achievement of the best possible lung function, with minimal side-effects.[1] A fixed level of lung function or symptom control is not normally defined as individuals may have different treatment goals and may wish to balance these against potential side effects. The updated 2006 GINA also provides a classification of levels of asthma control that can be used as a basis for ongoing treatment decisions (*Table 2*).

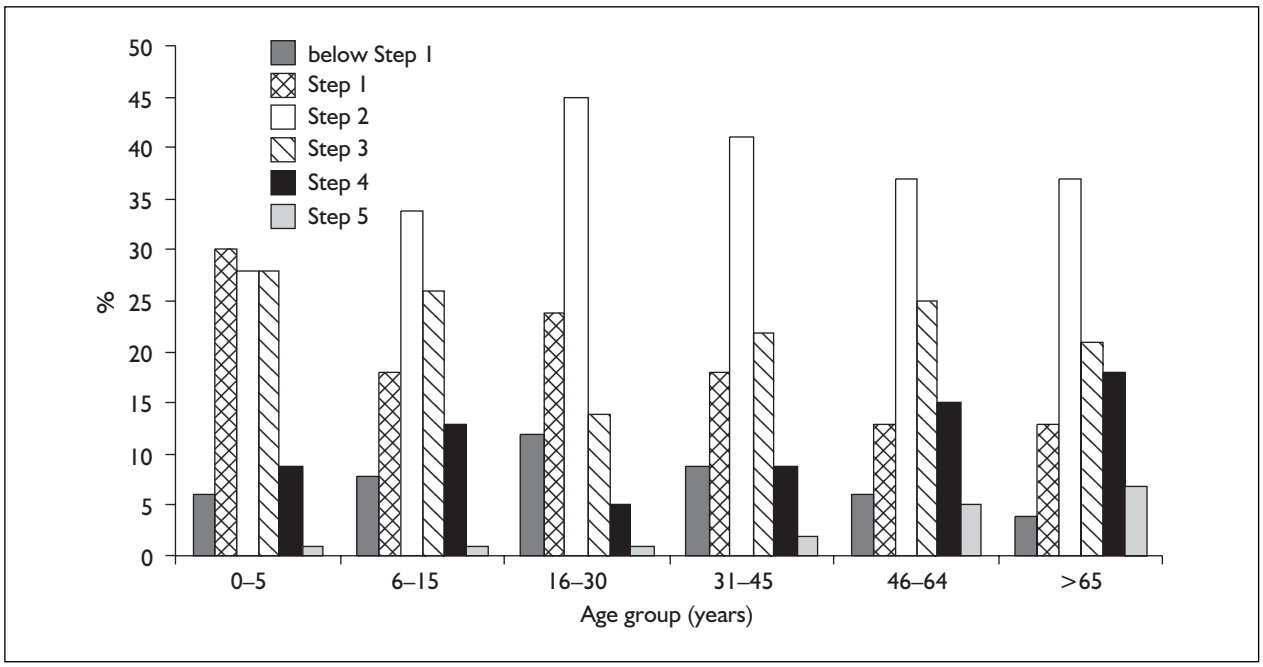

FIGURE 1 *Percentage of individuals at each step of the BTS/SIGN Guideline by age group. From a cross-sectional study performed by Neville and colleagues in 1994–5.*

TABLE 2 *GINA classification of levels of asthma control*

Characteristic	Controlled (all the following)	Partly controlled (any measure present in any week)	Uncontrolled
Daytime symptoms	None (twice or less per week)	More than twice per week	Three or more features of partly controlled asthma present in any week
Limitations of activities	None	Any	
Nocturnal symptoms/awakening	None	Any	
Need for reliever/rescue medication	None (twice or less per week)	More than twice per week	
Exacerbations	None	<80% predicted of personal best (if known)	

Source: Global Initiative for Asthma.[6]

Prognosis

The natural history of wheezing in children is well documented. Longitudinal population studies that have followed children into adulthood suggest that in some young children diagnosed with asthma, wheezing resolves spontaneously whereas in others, symptoms persist into adulthood.[7–13] Various factors including a family history of atopy (particularly a maternal history of atopy), coexistence of atopic disease, gender, bronchiolitis in infancy, parental smoking, birthweight and prematurity, age at first presentation, severity and frequency of episodes and lung function measurements have been demonstrated to influence the persistence of asthma into adulthood.[7–11,14]

Epidemiologists have suggested that there are several asthma phenotypes reflecting a heterogeneous collection of conditions that follow a common pathway (recurrent reversible airways obstruction) and that these conditions may have different prognostic outcomes.[12,15–17] Identified phenotypes include **transient early wheezing** (up to age 3 years), **non-atopic wheezing in preschool and school-aged children** and **IgE-mediated wheezing/asthma**. **Transient early wheezing** is associated with reduced lung function, prematurity and exposure to other siblings/children at daycare centres and is usually not associated with a family history of atopy. **Non-atopic wheezing in preschool and school-aged children** appears to be associated with viral infection, most commonly following respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) bronchiolitis. Studies suggest that RSV infection is a risk for subsequent wheezing during childhood, but that this type of wheezing generally resolves by the age of 13 years. **IgE-mediated wheezing/asthma** is associated with atopy and a genetic predisposition for sensitisation to allergens and is more likely to persist into adulthood. Early allergic sensitisation seems to play an important role in persistent asthma.[15–18]

Epidemiological studies of the natural history of lifetime lung function in healthy subjects show that FEV_1 increases during normal growth in childhood, followed by a stable phase in adolescence and early adulthood and a slow decline in FEV_1 after the age of 32 years. The maximum level of FEV_1 achieved and the rate of decline determine the severity of lung function impairment later in life in symptomatic adults. Risk factors associated with smaller increases in lung function and lower maximally attained levels of lung function in children and adolescents include lower respiratory tract infections and passive and active smoking.[19–21] The rate of decline is generally greater in people who smoke and in those with asthma than in the general population,[22] possibly as a result of deterioration in potentially reversible disease or the development of persistent obstruction following airway remodelling.[23] The natural variability in maximally achievable FEV_1 is reflected in reference values used to calculate lung function as a percentage of that predicted for a person of similar height, sex, age and race (weight is also sometimes considered) without a diagnosis of asthma (e.g. FEV_1 % predicted).

Epidemiology of asthma

Prevalence in the UK

Asthma UK estimate that there are 5.2 million people with asthma in the UK; this includes 700,000 people over the age of 65 years and 590,000 teenagers, approximately 2.9 million women and girls and 2.3 million men and boys.[24]

The Health Survey for England commissioned by the Department of Health in 1997 included data on self-reported asthma symptoms and diagnosis and measurements of lung function obtained from approximately 7000 children.[25] The prevalence of doctor-diagnosed asthma was 23% in boys and 18% in girls aged between 2 and 15 years (*Figure 2*). Approximately 19% of boys and 17% of girls reported wheezing within the preceding 12 months.[25]

The 1998 figures from the General Practice Research Database with a sampling frame of 211 general practices in England and Wales indicated that the prevalence of treated asthma per 1000 patients was 97.0 [95% confidence interval (CI): 93.8 to 100.2] and 132.1 (95% CI: 129.9 to 134.3) for boys aged between 0–4 years and 5–15 years, respectively. For girls the corresponding figures were 62.5 (95% CI 59.8 to 65.2) and 104.1 (95% CI: 102.0 to 106.1) for each age group.[26]

Mortality

Asthma deaths are rare; there were 1266 reported deaths in the UK due to asthma in 2004 (*Figure 3*) Most of these (70%) were in people over the age of 65 years; asthma deaths were more common in women than in men (64 versus 36%). There was one reported death due to asthma in 2004 among children younger than 4 years and 37 in those between the ages of 5 and 14 years. Slightly more deaths occurred in boys than in girls (23 versus 15). Several audits and case–control studies of asthma deaths in the UK have been conducted and suggest that risk factors fall into four categories: (1) disease severity, (2) medical care factors both prior to and during the fatal episode, (3) health behaviour such as reduced concordance with prescribed medication, poor inhaler technique and reduced contact with primary care services and (4) adverse psychosocial factors. Therefore, a proportion of deaths due to asthma are preventable, especially in those under the age of 65 years.[27–31]

Impact of asthma on health-related quality of life in children

Health-related quality of life (HRQoL) refers to the impact of disease and treatment on daily life. In contrast to the physiological outcome measures used to define control, the aim of HRQoL measurement is to assess the impact asthma has on a person's daily functioning and emotional well-being.[33] Studies suggest that individuals with asthma have impaired HRQoL, and that morbidity as expressed by HRQoL in individuals with asthma is substantial.[34]

When considering the impact of asthma, it is important to acknowledge the differences that may exist between control of disease, as defined by clinical measures, and its impact on HRQoL. It should not be assumed that meeting clinical treatment goals will necessarily be meaningful to

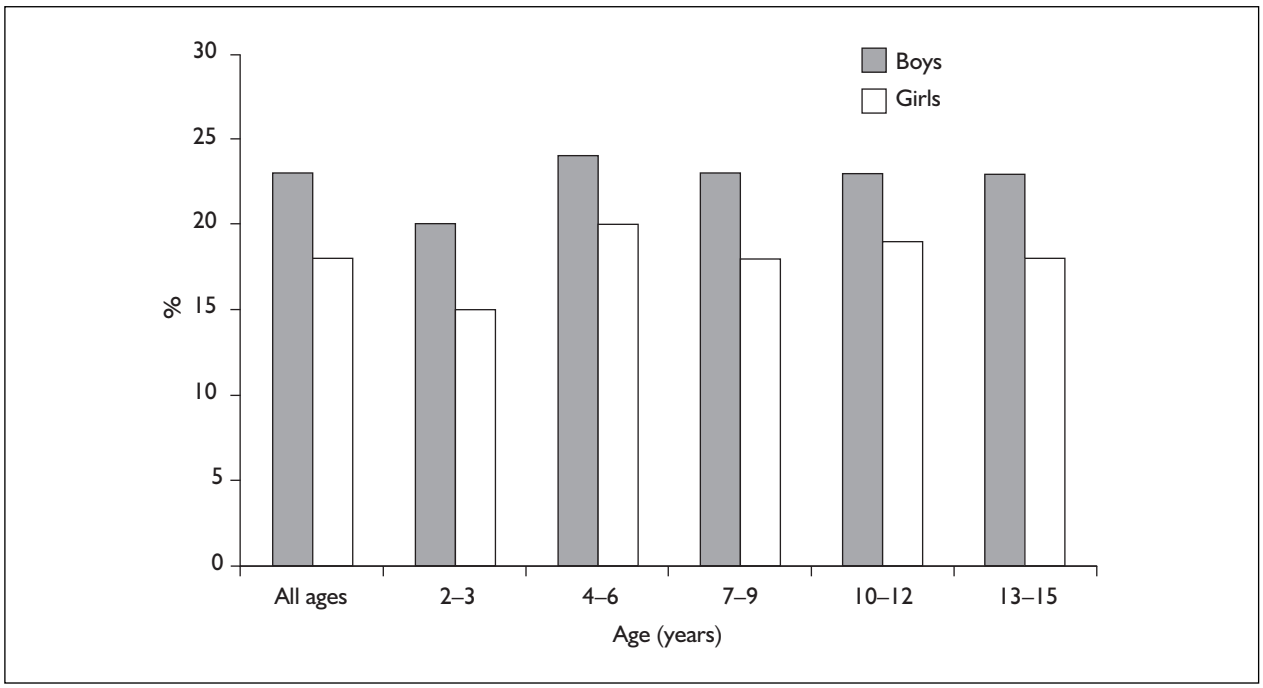

FIGURE 2 *Percentage of boys and girls (aged 2–15 years) with a doctor diagnosis of asthma in the Health Survey of England 1997. Source: Health Survey for England 1997.*[25]

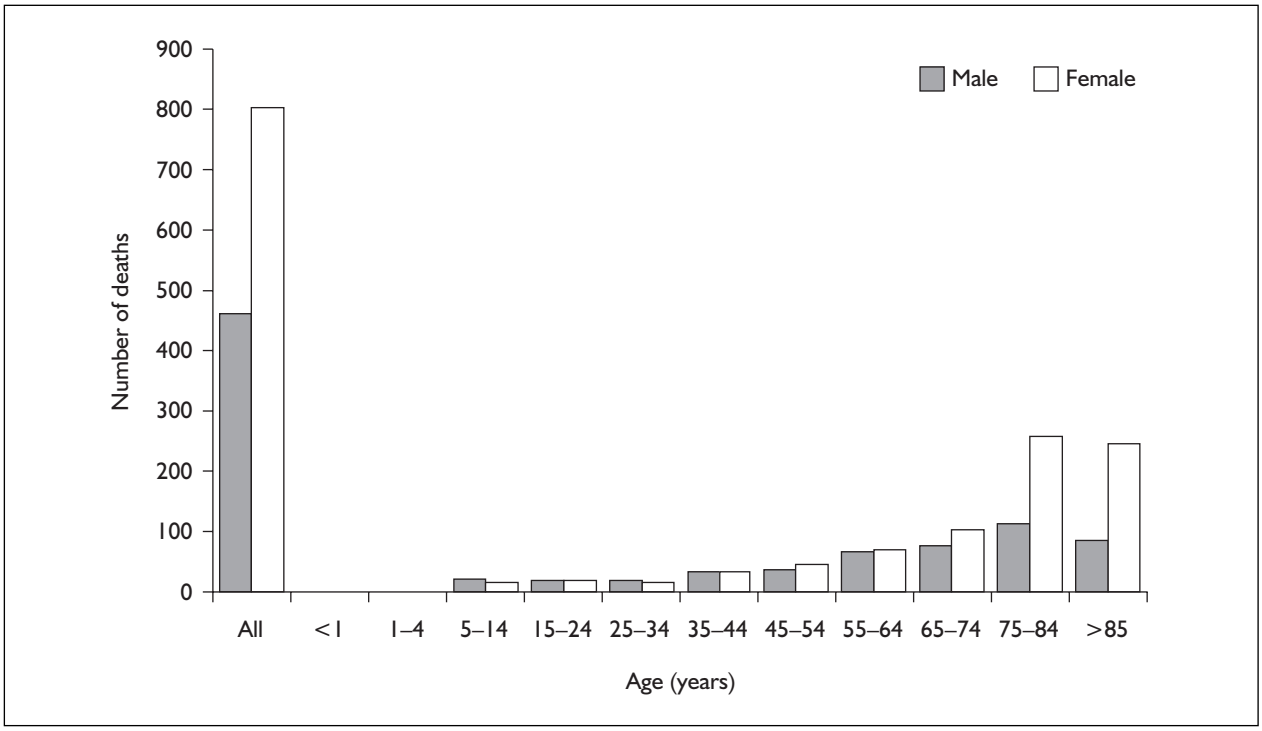

FIGURE 3 *Asthma deaths by age and sex, registrations in 2004. Source: Office for National Statistics.*[32]

individuals with asthma, in terms of improvements in HRQoL.[35]

In the Living with Asthma Study performed in Australia, one in five children with asthma did not ride a bike, play at school or play with animals, and one in three did not participate in organised sports.[36] The study also reported that parents of children with asthma were more anxious than parents of children who did not have asthma. In a UK study of children with asthma aged between 5 and 17 years, children reported that asthma restricted their participation in everyday activities and caused frequent school absences and night disturbances.[37]

The assessment of HRQoL in children is challenging.[38,39] HRQoL measures may not be appropriate for use in paediatric populations, due to either lack of content validity or differences in the measurement process itself.

Adult instruments have been used in studies of HRQoL in children, and additionally several instruments have been devised for use within paediatric populations, including the Childhood Asthma Questionnaire (CHQ),[40] the Paediatric Asthma Quality of Life Questionnaire (PAQLQ),[41] the Asthma Symptoms and Disability Questionnaire (ASDQ),[42] the Life Activities Questionnaire for Childhood Asthma (LAQCA),[43] the Paediatric Asthma Health Outcome Measure (PAHOM),[44] the Paediatric Asthma Impact Survey (PAIS-6), the DYNHA Paediatric Asthma Impact Survey,[45] the About My Asthma (AMA) questionnaire[46] and the Adolescent Asthma Quality of Life Questionnaire (AAQOL).[33] Chiou and colleagues have also proposed that the PAHOM, a multi-attribute measure of health in asthma, may be used to estimate a single index measure of health status [a quality-adjusted life-year (QALY) value].[44] There are potential methodological issues with many of these instruments which may be specific to particular age ranges within the paediatric study population.

Current service provision

Asthma management in the UK

As stated previously, the management of asthma in the UK is largely based on the BTS/SIGN Guideline.[1] The Guideline is evidence-based and was developed in collaboration with Asthma UK, the Royal College of Physicians of London, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, the General Practice Airways Group and the British Association of Accident and Emergency Medicine using SIGN methodology adapted for UK-wide utilisation. The Guideline recommends strategies

for both non-pharmacological and pharmacological management of chronic and acute asthma. Only the pharmacological management of chronic asthma is relevant to this appraisal and is described in more detail below.

The Guideline advocates a stepwise approach to pharmacological management, which aims to achieve early control and to maintain control by stepping up treatment when control is poor and stepping down treatment when control is good. Recommendations differ slightly depending on the age of the child (*Figures 4* and *5*). At all levels, there is an emphasis on checking inhaler technique and concordance with existing therapy and the identification and avoidance of trigger factors before the level of therapy is increased. Regular review of treatment level and asthma control is also recommended at all levels, so that individuals are maintained at the lowest possible step of the Guideline.

At **Step 1** (mild intermittent asthma), inhaled short-acting beta$_2$ agonists (SABAs) are recommended as the agent of choice, to be prescribed as needed. A review of asthma management with possible movement to **Step 2** (introduction of regular preventer therapy) is indicated if an individual has had exacerbations of asthma in the last 2 years, is using inhaled

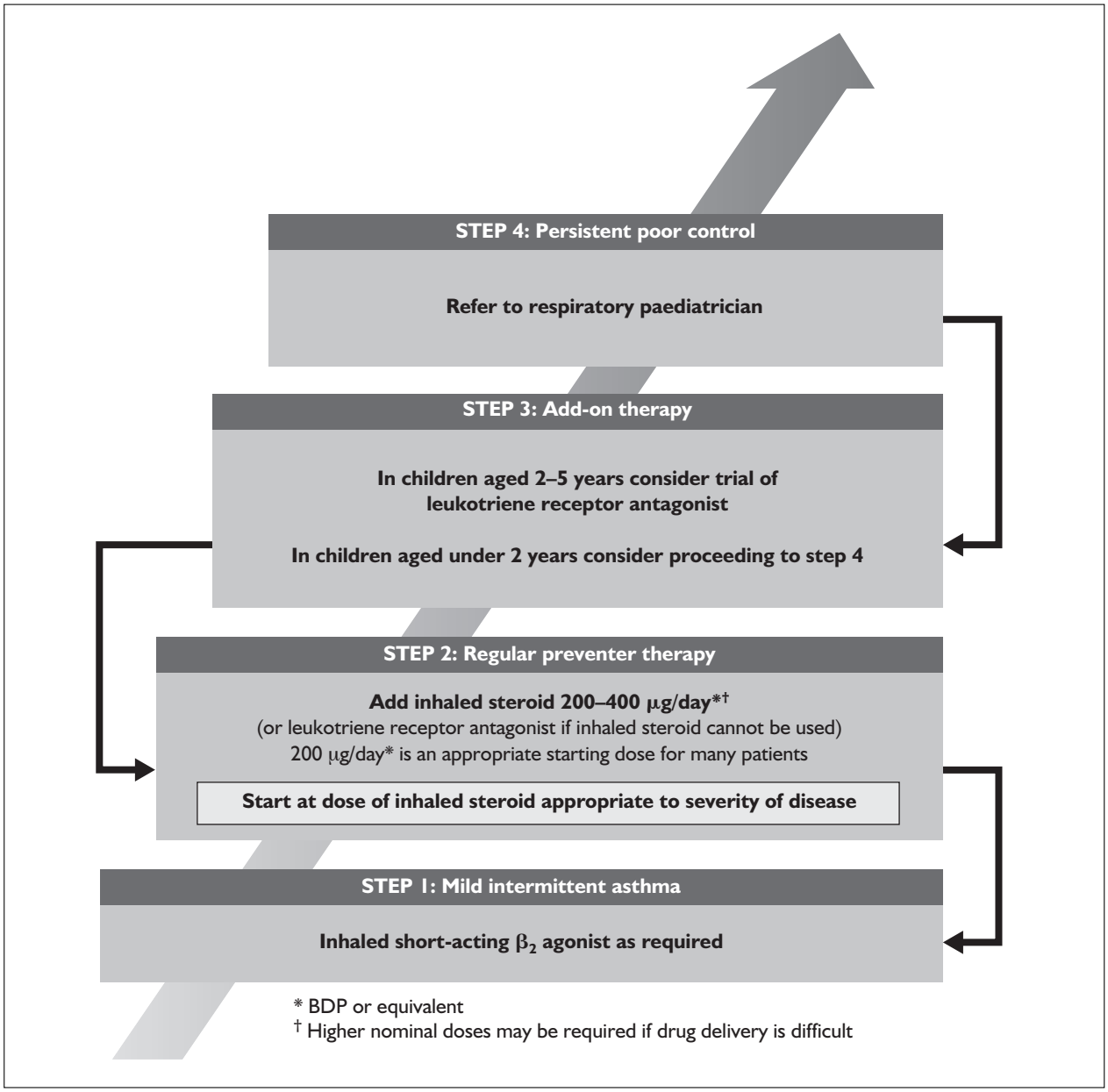

FIGURE 4 *Summary of stepwise management in children aged 0–5 years. Source: BTS/SIGN Guideline.*[1]

SABAs three times per week or more or is symptomatic three times per week or more or waking on one occasion a week. The exact threshold at which movement to step 2 should be considered has not been firmly established and varies between individuals. The recommended preventer therapy at Step 2 is an inhaled corticosteroid (ICS) at a starting dose of 200 µg/day [beclometasone dipropionate (BDP) equivalent; given as 100 µg twice daily]. The highest recommended dose at this level is 400 µg/day (BDP equivalent), although higher doses may be required in children less than 5 years of age if drug delivery is difficult. The dose should be titrated to the lowest dose at which effective control of asthma is maintained. If ICS cannot be used, a leukotriene receptor antagonist is the next therapy of choice. If asthma control is not adequate at this level of treatment, movement to **Step 3** may be necessary. In children less than 2 years of age, referral to a respiratory paediatrician is the recommended course of action. A trial of a leukotriene receptor antagonist may be considered in those between the ages of

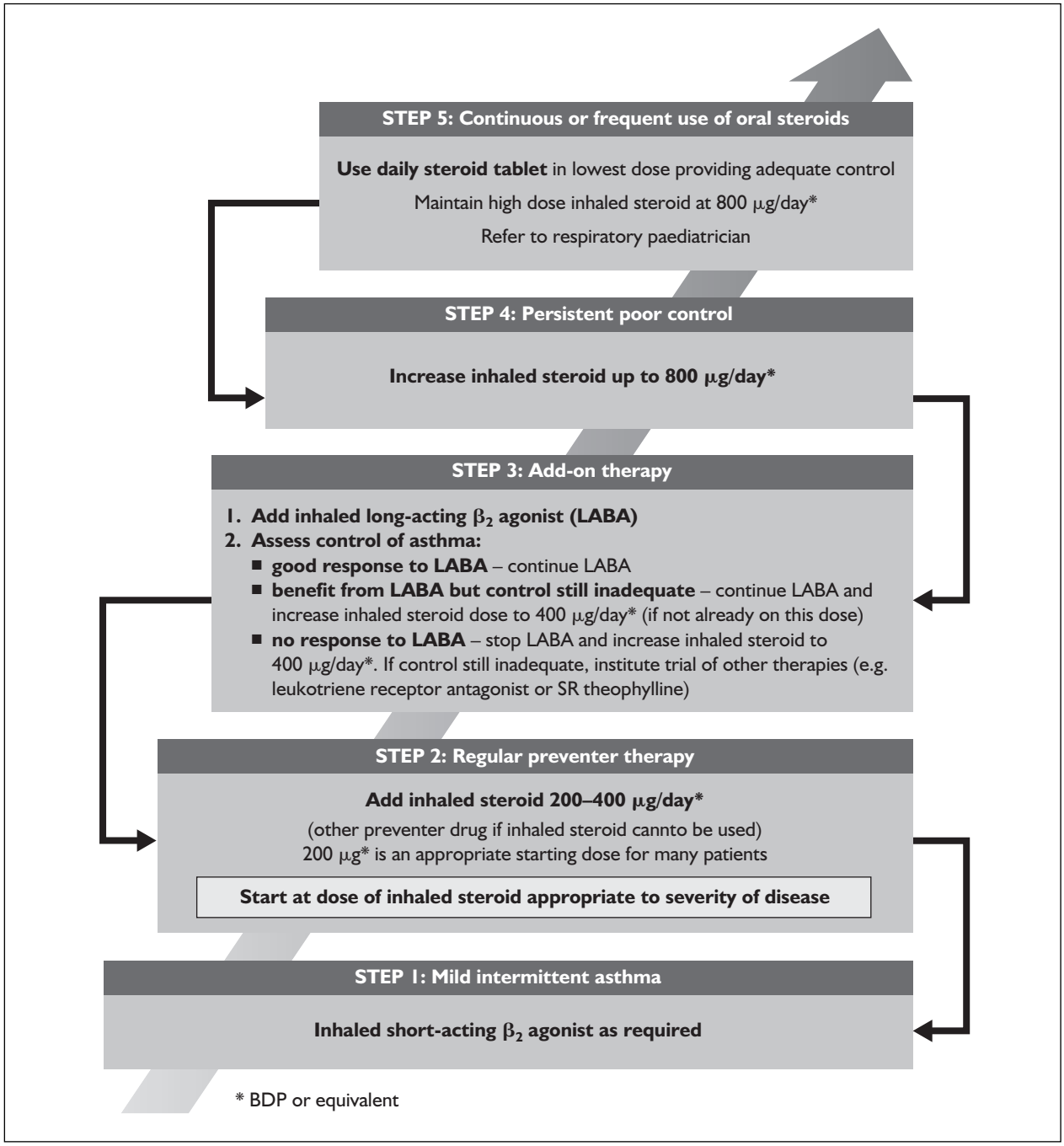

FIGURE 5 *Summary of stepwise management in children aged 5–12 years. Source: BTS/SIGN Guideline.*[1]

2 and 5 years. For children between the ages of 5 and 12 years, the first choice of add-on therapy is a long-acting beta$_2$ agonist (LABA), although other agents can be used, such as leukotriene receptor antagonists, theophyllines and slow-release beta$_2$ agonist tablets. However, anecdotal reports suggest that leukotriene receptor antagonists are becoming more popular than LABAs as a first choice of add-on therapy. If asthma control remains suboptimal after the addition of a LABA, the dose of ICS may be increased to 400 µg/day (BDP equivalent) with or without the LABA. If asthma control is still suboptimal, despite treatment with 400 µg/day of ICS, other agents should be trialled before moving to **Step 4**. Step 4 in the under-fives involves referral to a respiratory paediatrician. In older children (between 5 and 12 years old), the dose of ICS may be increased to 800 µg/day. **Step 5** involves referral to a respiratory paediatrician and the addition of a daily oral corticosteroid tablet at the lowest dose possible to provide adequate control. There is no Step 5 in children under the age of 5 years. Administration of ICS above 400 µg/day (BDP equivalent) may be associated with systemic side-effects (see the section 'Adverse events', p. 11) and therefore the monitoring of growth and adrenal function is recommended. Once control of asthma is achieved, it is recommended that treatment be stepped down to the lowest possible level.[1]

A large proportion of individuals with asthma are managed within primary care, often within nurse-led asthma clinics. As part of the new General Medical Services contract and Quality Outcomes Framework in England UK, GPs are encouraged to perform annual reviews on all registered individuals with asthma within their practice.[47] Figures for England for 2004–5 suggest that most practices are achieving the targets for asthma set out within the framework.[48]

Asthma management plans (action plans)

The use of written plans to aid individuals in the self-management of their asthma symptoms has been shown to lead to reduced utilisation of healthcare resources, days off work or school and improvements in nocturnal asthma symptoms[49] and to protect against death from asthma.[50] The use of action plans is advocated in the BTS/SIGN Guideline.[1] The aim of such plans is to provide individuals with information that allows them to respond to changes in their asthma control either by changing their level of treatment or by seeking advice from a health professional at the first signs of an asthma exacerbation. The evidence for their efficacy in adults with moderate to severe asthma, treated primarily within the secondary care setting, is particularly strong.[51–53] Plans based on symptom scores and on measurements of PEF have both been found to be effective in adults.[54] There have been fewer studies conducted on the effectiveness of action plans in children and these are further complicated by the fact that either the parent/carer or the child themselves may be responsible for monitoring asthma control and responding appropriately to the guidance provided in the action plan. However, there is evidence that children with a written asthma management plan are at risk of fewer exacerbations requiring the need for acute intervention than those without.[55] Anecdotal reports suggest that most children in the UK have a written asthma management plan that may be used by either the parent/carer or the child themselves. Most of these are based on symptoms rather than measurements of PEF. Despite this evidence of effectiveness, there is some indication in the literature that asthma management plans are not very popular with health professionals or with individuals.[56] Action plans that incorporate an individual's personal experience of their disease are likely to be more successful.[57]

Concordance

Improving concordance with ICS therapy is recognised as an important aim for education and management. Since the effects of ICS can take several weeks both to manifest themselves following initiation of therapy and to decline following cessation of therapy, there may appear to be little incentive for individuals to take these medications, as prescribed, for long periods of time. Anxiety surrounding the risk of adverse events (AEs) with ICS may also affect concordance, especially amongst parents of young children.[58] A systematic review conducted in 2000 by Cochrane and colleagues identified 10 studies that reported concordance with ICS measured using electronic devices contained within the inhaler device.[59] All but one of these studies was conducted in adults. Overall, subjects took the recommended doses of medication on 20–73% of days. Average concordance, measured as the ratio of doses taken to doses prescribed, ranged from 63 to 92%.[59] The study conducted in children was based on only 14 children, and reported 55% of days when children used less than 50% of the prescribed dose.[60] A further study conducted amongst children in the USA, also using an electronic device within the inhaler, reported an average of 50% concordance with perfect dosing (100% of prescribed daily dose taken); when the timing of doses was also

considered, the concordance was even lower. Non-concordance was highest amongst older children and adolescents, non-white children and those with poorer functioning families.[61] Non-concordance was associated with a higher probability of relapse with a need for treatment with oral corticosteroids. Concordance measured in these studies may be better than that seen in the community since individuals were aware that their concordance with prescribed treatment regimens was under scrutiny.

An alternative method of measuring concordance with prescribed medication is to study the uptake of repeat prescriptions. A study that used records from the General Practice Research Database in the UK and included 284,733 individuals prescribed ICS over a 10-year study period found that only 42% of individuals obtained a repeat prescription for ICS within the expected timeframe of the preceding prescription.[62] A further UK study, conducted in a general practice in Nottinghamshire, reported that 39% of individuals with asthma on regular corticosteroids had requested less than 80% of the expected dose. The authors comment that this may be due to non-concordance or due to individuals adjusting their ICS dose as a result of improvements in asthma control.[63]

Poor concordance is associated with poor asthma control[64] and increased exacerbation frequency[65] in children. Concordance is likely to be enhanced if both the parent/carer and the child are involved and if using inhalers is part of the household routine.[64] There was also an indication from this study that some parents are apprehensive about long-term prophylactic treatment and would rather treat their children's asthma as a series of acute events (often requiring courses of oral corticosteroids).[64] Education programmes have been shown to improve concordance in adults and may also play a role in improving concordance within families.[66]

Description of technology under assessment

Inhaled corticosteroids

Products available

There are currently three ICS licensed for use in children in England and Wales.

- *Beclometasone dipropionate (BDP)* was the first ICS available in the UK, introduced in 1972. It is available in metered-dose inhalers (MDIs) with chlorofluorocarbon (CFC) propellants in both proprietary [Becloforte and Becotide (Allen and Hanburys)] and non-proprietary formulations [AeroBec (3M), Beclazone Easi-Breathe (IVAX), Clenil Modulite (Trinity Chiesi), Filair (3M), Filair Forte (3M), Pulvinal BDP (Trinity Chiesi)], dry powder inhalers (DPIs) [Asmabec Clickhaler (Celltech), Becodisks (Allen and Hanburys), Easyhaler (Ranbaxy)] and hard capsule powder inhalers [BDP Cyclocaps (APS)].
- *Budesonide (BUD)* is available in MDIs with CFC propellants in both proprietary {Pulmicort [AstraZeneca (AZ)]} and non-proprietary formulations [Novolizer (Viatris)], DPIs [Pulmicort Turbohaler (AZ)] and hard capsule powder inhalers [BUD Cyclocaps (APS)].
- *Fluticasone propionate (FP)* is available in MDIs with non-CFC propellants [Flixotide Evohaler (Allen and Hanburys)] and in DPIs [Flixotide Accuhaler, Flixotide Diskhaler (Allen and Hanburys)].

Devices

Several types of inhaler device have been developed in order to deliver drugs directly to the airways, rather than rely on absorption of oral preparations.

MDIs may be breath activated or pressurised (pMDI). They contain the drug either as a suspension in a carrier liquid or as a solution which is delivered through a CFC or hydrofluoroalkane (HFA) propellant. HFA propellants were phased in to replace CFC propellants when it was realised that the latter may have ozone-depleting properties. Studies show that HFA propellants deliver a greater proportion of fine particles than CFC propellants in the same device, resulting in a greater proportion of the drug being deposited in the small airways.[67] Use of a spacer device in conjunction with an MDI can also alter patterns of lung deposition by delivering a greater proportion of fine particles.[67] Many devices used in younger children (especially those below the age of 5 years) incorporate an MDI and a valved holding chamber or spacer. Using one of these devices involves inhalation of the drug by breathing normally through the spacer, rather than requiring breath activation or other physical coordination.

DPIs require less coordination by an individual in order to achieve correct inhaler technique. However, lung deposition is flow dependent, requiring a forceful, deep inhalation to trigger the device correctly. The higher the flow rate,

the smaller is the particle size and the better the lung deposition.[68] DPIs are often not appropriate for children below the ages of 5–6 years.

There is a wide variety of available delivery systems based on these three types of inhaler device. Inhaler technique, individual preference and cost are all factors that may guide healthcare professionals in their choice of inhaler device.

Although potentially important in the decision as to which ICS might be best suited to an individual, the comparison of inhaler devices is beyond the scope of this appraisal.

Inhaler technique

The ability to use an inhaler correctly is essential if the anticipated dose of an agent is to be delivered successfully to the correct area within the lungs. A systematic review of the assessment of correct inhaler technique identified 15 studies in adults that evaluated inhaler technique using a variety of inhaler devices (including MDIs and DPIs).[59] Physicians assessed inhaler technique as 'good' in between 5 and 86% of subjects. Coordination of MDI activation with onset of inspiration was cited as a task which individuals found particularly difficult (17–68% of individuals were unable to do this in this set of studies).[59] In several studies, education improved technique, but the amount of improvement was variable (from 6 to 46% in one study[69]). Studies in children suggest that this facet of effective asthma therapy is even more problematic and that repeated comprehensive education is necessary to ensure adequate inhaler technique.[70,71]

Mechanism of action

ICS suppress inflammation in the lungs and are the mainstay in the prophylactic treatment of chronic asthma. Regular treatment with corticosteroids reduces inflammation, swelling and mucus production in the lungs, resulting in better airflow in and out of the airways, fewer exacerbations, better control of symptoms and lung function and ultimately a reduction in hospital admissions and deaths from asthma.[72–74] The anti-inflammatory effects may take between 1 to 3 weeks to become apparent and it may take up to 12 weeks of regular daily treatment before maximum benefit is seen. However, the length of time taken to achieve maximal treatment benefit is dependent on both asthma severity at baseline and the outcome measure used to assess treatment effect.[75,76] Those with severe asthma when ICS treatment is started may take longer to achieve maximal treatment effect than those with mild asthma.[75] ICS are often referred to by individuals with asthma as 'preventers'.

Pharmacology

The mechanism of action of corticosteroids in asthma has not been fully elucidated. However, corticosteroids are known to exert their effects by binding to a glucocorticoid receptor located in the cytoplasm of target cells. Once activated, the drug–receptor complex moves into the nucleus of the cell and binds to the DNA and directly or indirectly regulates the transcription of target genes. Control of inflammation is believed to be a result of an increase in the transcription of anti-inflammatory genes and a decrease in the transcription of inflammatory genes.[77] The potency of a given corticosteroid is governed by the affinity of the drug to bind to the glucocorticoid receptor. Receptor affinity is usually measured relative to dexamethasone. Of the corticosteroids currently licensed for use in children, FP has the highest relative receptor affinity, followed by the active metabolites of BDP (BDP 17-monopropionate) (*Table 3*).

One of the currently available corticosteroids (BDP) is also a prodrug, i.e. a pharmacologically

TABLE 3 *Pharmacodynamic and pharmacokinetic characteristics of currently available ICS*

ICS	RRA	Oral bioavailability (%)	Pulmonary bioavailability (%) (device)	Comments	Refs
BDP	53	15–20	55–60 (HFA–MDI)		78
17-BMP	1345	26	36 (CFC–MDI)	Active metabolite of BDP	78
BUD	935	11	18 (CFC–MDI)		79,80
FP	1800	<1	17 (DPI) 26 (CFC–MDI) 29 (HFA–MDI)		81,82

RRA, relative receptor affinity.

inactive compound which is activated by esterases found only in the lungs.[77] This mechanism should serve to decrease the occurrence of local side-effects with this agent.

Due to the ubiquitous nature of the glucocorticoid receptor, corticosteroids act on a wide range of cell types and are therefore capable of producing unwanted systemic effects in addition to their anti-inflammatory actions (see the next section). In theory, by administering corticosteroids directly to the airways via inhaler devices, smaller doses of the drug are required, drug concentrations at the site of action are higher and the likelihood of systemic side-effects is reduced. However, the pharmacokinetics of each individual product will substantially modify these effects.

The bioavailability of ICS determines the extent of systemic side-effects and is a measure of the rate and extent at which the drug reaches the target site and the systemic circulation. After inhalation, a large proportion of the dose is swallowed. Oral bioavailability depends on absorption characteristics from the gastrointestinal tract and the extent of first-pass metabolism and ranges from 1% (FP) to 26% (active metabolite of BDP) for currently available compounds (*Table 3*). Pulmonary bioavailability depends on the amount deposited in the lungs, will differ for different delivery devices and ranges from 17% for FP delivered via a DPI to 55–60% for BDP delivered via an MDI with HFA propellant. (*Table 3*).[78–82]

Once it reaches the circulation, most of the absorbed drug binds to plasma proteins and only the unbound fraction is pharmacologically active.[78–84] All currently available ICS are cleared by the liver.

Adverse events

AEs associated with ICS use can be categorised into local or systemic events. There appears to be a wide spectrum of level of concern amongst clinicians about the occurrence of AEs as a result of therapy with ICS. Anecdotally, some clinicians appear to be very aware of the risk of systemic AEs, whereas others are reassured by the low frequency at which they are encountered in practice.

Local AEs with ICS use are less frequently observed in children than in adults.

- The occurrence of dysphonia or other noticeable voice changes during treatment with BUD in children is similar to placebo.[209] Additionally, oral candidiasis is reasonably rare, being observed in ~1% of children treated with ICS. When this is observed, its prevalence appears to be positively correlated with total daily dose and dosing frequency.[85,86] Other risk factors for the development of oral candidiasis include concomitant antibiotic therapy, concomitant nasal or systemic corticosteroids and immunosuppression. Candida overgrowth is usually the direct result of local corticosteroid inhibition of the normal host defence functions of neutrophils, macrophages and T lymphocytes at the oral mucosal surface. Therefore, overgrowth can be reduced by use of a spacer device, decreasing the dosing frequency and rinsing the mouth after drug administration.
- The AEs of **cough, throat irritation and bronchoconstriction** are thought to be caused primarily by upper airway irritation by the propellants or surfactants present in the aerosol. This reaction, which may be most marked after upper respiratory tract infections, can prevent adequate deposition of the inhaled steroid in the lungs, and thereby cause a worsening of asthma symptoms. These post-inhalation symptoms can be reduced by pretreatment with a bronchodilator, use of a spacer device, use of a slow inhalation technique or a change to a dry powder formulation.[87]

Systemic AEs occur as a result of the amount of drug that reaches systemic circulation by absorption through the lungs or the gastrointestinal system. As previously outlined, this is influenced by the pharmacokinetics of the ICS, the site of deposition and inter-individual characteristics that may influence the risk of systemic AEs. Accurate assessment of systemic AEs associated with ICS use is often confounded by the concomitant use of other steroid preparations, such as oral or nasal inhaled steroids.[85,88,89] The most commonly occurring systemic adverse events potentially associated with long-term ICS use are adrenal suppression, growth retardation in infants, children and adolescents, osteoporosis, skin thinning and easy bruising, cataract formation and glaucoma.

The effects of ICS on **suppression of hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) function** have been well documented.[89–91] In general, studies have indicated that HPA axis suppression is associated with the use of doses exceeding the equivalent of 1500 µg/day of BDP or BUD in adults (the equivalent of 400 µg/day of BDP or BUD in children). The effect appears to be more

marked with BDP than with BUD.[92–96] Dose-ranging studies in adults and children indicate that single doses of FP exhibit three-fold greater adrenal suppression than BUD, on a microgram equivalent basis.[97] One randomised controlled trial (RCT) compared the effects of FP 1500 µg/day and BUD 1600 µg/day with placebo in both healthy participants and participants with moderately severe asthma over 7 days.[98] The trial used the outcomes of urinary levels of total cortisol metabolites (TCM), morning serum cortisol levels and osteocalcin levels as markers of corticosteroid absorption. Results indicated that FP had a greater effect on the two markers of the HPA axis (TCM and morning serum cortisol levels) than BUD, although neither difference was significant. Conversely, BUD was associated with a significant difference in reduced osteocalcin concentration levels in both healthy and asthmatic participants relative to FP.

Further studies conducted in paediatric populations suggest that between one-quarter and two-thirds of children on high-dose ICS will show biochemical adrenal suppression on sensitive testing.[232] Estimates of the prevalence of suppression have varied somewhat depending on the populations studied and the methods used to characterise adrenal suppression, and accordingly vary between 25%[233] and 70%.[234]

There have also been cases of adrenal crisis associated with ICS use documented in the literature.[99,100] A survey of the frequency of adrenal crisis associated with ICS use[99] showed that from an initial 2912 questionnaires, 33 cases of adrenal crisis were identified. Twenty-eight of the cases were identified in children and five in adults. Of these 33 patients who had received ICS in the range 500–2000 µg/day, 30 (91%) had received FP, one (3%) FP and BUD and two (6%) BDP. In all these patients except one, the duration of oral corticosteroid therapy in the previous 12 months was estimated to be less than 21 days.

Overall, although the biochemical changes in markers of HPA axis suppression are unequivocal, their clinical importance remains unclear, and even at high doses of ICS there remains significant inter-individual variability, with many patients demonstrating little or no evidence of adrenal suppression.[92,93]

The effect of ICS on **growth in children** has been a controversial issue. A number of short-term studies using knemometry (measurement of lower limb length using highly accurate measures) have demonstrated that high-dose ICS use is associated with short-term growth suppression.[101–103] Although the exact mechanism of action is not known, it is thought to be secondary to subnormal androgen secretion followed by suppression of growth hormone production.[104] However, the majority of studies have only assessed short-term linear growth and have not assessed long-term growth and the effects on final adult height. A number of other factors also make the assessment of the effects of ICS use on short-term growth rates difficult, including the fact that nutritional status, growth hormones and sex hormones will affect growth to different extents at various ages, growth can be slower in winter when the requirement for ICS treatment may be increased, the type of inhalation device used may influence lung deposition and systemic availability, and poorly controlled asthma is known to inhibit growth rates.[102,105,106] Longer term studies that have assessed final adult height have indicated that although growth may temporarily be suppressed, there was no association between ICS use and final adult height attained.[102,106]

One of the major concerns of long-term ICS use is the potential for AEs on bone turnover, resulting in an increased risk for **osteoporosis and fracture**. This is mediated through the inhibition of osteoblast function (bone formation) and by increasing osteoclast function (leading to increased bone resorption). These act indirectly by inhibiting intestinal calcium absorption and renal calcium reabsorption, causing secondary hyperparathyroidism. A number of studies have assessed the effects of high dose ICS use on markers of serum osteoclastin and urinary hydroxyproline.[107,108] These studies have shown mixed results, with some demonstrating decreased bone formation and increased bone reabsorption in a dose-dependent manner,[107,108] whereas others have shown no effects on plasma osteoclastin concentrations at doses of BDP and BUD as high as 2000 µg/day.[109] Similarly, high doses of both BDP and BUD have also not shown any effect on urinary calcium excretion, intestinal calcium absorption, serum calcium, phosphate or parathyroid hormone levels.[110,111] In relation to bone density, there is limited evidence from two studies that high dose ICS use for a duration of 3 years was associated with an 18% reduction in lumbar spine density[111] and a reduction in both lumbar spine and femoral neck density.[112] However, in both of these studies all subjects had previously received treatment with oral corticosteroids. Additional evidence from a cross-

sectional study of patients treated with ICS at a median cumulative dose of 876 µg/day over a 6-year period, indicated that there was a negative association between cumulative steroid dose and bone mineral density (BMD) at the lumbar spine, femoral neck, Ward's triangle and trochanter, both before and after the adjustment for the effects of age and sex.[113] A doubling of the dose of ICS was associated with a decrease in BMD at the lumbar spine of 0.16 standard deviation (SD) (95% CI 0.04 to 0.28). Decreases of a similar magnitude were observed at the femoral neck, Ward's triangle and trochanter. The majority of the study participants were from a primary care population with relatively mild asthma, so that potentially neither the underlying disease itself not a substantial use of oral corticosteroids were probable confounders. Additionally, the study participants were between 20 and 40 years of age, so that the confounding effects of age and menopausal status were minimised. However, the exact implications of the findings of an association between cumulative dose of ICS and reductions in BMD from the study would need to be verified in a longitudinal study, particularly since bone loss with oral corticosteroid therapy is time dependent and most rapid in the first 12–24 months of treatment duration.[114]

Three further studies conducted in children have shown that doses of BDP and BUD up to 800 µg/day did not affect bone density,[115,116] and the lumbar spine density of children receiving BDP 300–400 µg/day for 6 months was not different from that of the control group.[117] Overall, the long-term consequences of administering ICS for many decades from early childhood are not known.

There is evidence that the use of high-dose ICS is associated with **skin thinning and easy bruising**.[118,119] One study showed that skin thickness measured by an ultrasound scan was significantly reduced by 15–19% in subjects on BDP 1000–2250 µg/day compared with controls.[118] In addition, the prevalence of bruising was significantly higher at 48% in this patient population compared with 12% in the control population.[118] The results of a further survey also indicated that easy bruising was the commonest reported symptom, with the use of ICS occurring in almost half of the individuals.[119] The relative risk of easy bruising was more than double that of a population of a similar age and sex distribution not taking ICS. This risk also increased with age, dose and duration of therapy.[119] The presence of skin bruising can be considered a visible marker of the AEs of ICS therapy on collagen turnover in connective tissue. However, it is unclear whether early susceptibility to skin bruising relates to effects on collagen in other systemic tissues such as bone.[120] Therefore, the absence of skin bruising cannot necessarily be taken as a guide to the safety of a given dose of ICS.

Posterior subcapsular cataract (PSC) is a well-recognised complication of treatment with oral corticosteroids, with the incidence increasing with both dose and duration of treatment.[121,122] The incidence also depends on the individual's age (particularly in children) and ethnic origin, with Hispanic people being more susceptible to development of PSCs.[121] However, the evidence of an association between ICS use and development of a PSC is equivocal and often confounded by previous exposure to oral corticosteroid therapy. Three studies have reported no association between long-term low- and high-dose ICS therapy in adults and the prevalence of PSCs.[123–125] A further population based survey reported that after adjustment for age and sex, the relative prevalence ratio for corticosteroid versus no corticosteroid exposure was 1.9 (95% CI 1.3 to 1.9) for posterior subcapsular, 1.5 (95% CI 1.2 to 1.9) for nuclear, and 1.1 (95% CI 0.9 to 1.3) for cortical cataracts.[126] The relative prevalence ratio of posterior subcapsular cataracts for a lifetime dose of BDP of >2000 µg/day was 5.5 (95% CI 2.3 to 13.0).[126]

As cataracts in children are very rare, even large increases in risk may be missed in studies of children and adolescents.[127] The results of one study found no increased risk for the development of cataracts after an average of 5 years of follow-up,[124] and when cataracts have been found in studies, participants have had numerous courses of oral corticosteroids.[125]

There have also been case reports suggesting that ICS use may be associated with the development of **ocular hypertension or open-angle glaucoma**.[128,129] The results of one case–control study showed that after adjustment for age, sex, diabetes, systemic hypertension and the use of ophthalmic or oral corticosteroids, there was no association between current use of inhaled or intranasal corticosteroids and an increased risk for ocular hypertension or open-angle glaucoma. However, those individuals who were using high doses of corticosteroid on a regular basis for 3 months or more were at a small, significantly increased risk, with an odds ratio (OR) of 1.44 (95% CI 1.10 to 2.06).[130]

Long-acting beta$_2$ agonists

Products available

There are currently two LABAs licensed for use in children in England and Wales:

- **Salmeterol** (SAL) is available in MDIs with CFC propellants [Serevent (Allen and Hanburys)] and in DPIs [Accuhaler (Allen and Hanburys) and Diskhaler (Allen and Hanburys)].
- **Formoterol fumarate** (FF) (previously known as eformoterol) is available in MDIs with non-CFC propellants [Altimos Modulite (Trinity Chiesi)] and in DPIs [Oxis Turbohaler (AZ) and Foradil (Novartis)].

Combination products available

Both of these products are licensed for use in combination with an ICS in the following combinations:

- **BUD combined with FF** (BUD/FF) is available in DPIs [Symbicort Turbohaler (AZ)].
- **FP and SAL** (FF/SAL) is available in MDIs with non-CFC propellants [Seretide Evohaler (Allen and Hanburys)] and DPIs [Seretide Accuhaler (Allen and Hanburys)].

BUD/FF is licensed for use in children aged over 6 years and FP/SAL in children aged over 4 years.

Mechanisms of action of LABAs

LABAs produce sustained bronchodilation (relaxation of the airways), improving airflow in and out of the lungs. In contrast to SABAs (e.g. salbutamol, terbutaline), which are used for quick relief of symptoms, these compounds are administered on a regular basis for long-term control of symptoms.

Pharmacology

The two currently available LABAs (SAL and FF) are highly selective beta$_2$ adrenoceptor agonists which produce a bronchodilator effect lasting for at least 12 hours after a single inhalation. They act principally on smooth muscle beta$_2$ adrenoceptors, which are widely distributed throughout the bronchial tree; the highest density of beta$_2$ adrenoceptors is found in the alveoli.[131] Both agents are highly potent (i.e. they are effective at low concentrations). Comparative studies suggest that the potency ratio is approximately 5:1 (FF:SAL) for both systemic side-effects seen in healthy volunteers[132,133] and bronchodilator effects seen in people with asthma.[134] Onset of bronchodilation with FF is within 2–3 minutes whereas the onset of bronchodilation with SAL takes approximately 10 minutes and the maximal effect may not be apparent for several hours.[135] FF is more lipophilic than SAL and has a much higher degree of intrinsic agonist activity.[136] In addition to bronchodilator effects, LABAs also provide protection from a number of stimuli causing bronchial hyper-responsiveness, such as methacholine, cold air, exercise, hyperventilation and histamine.[137] Despite some indication of anti-inflammatory activity in laboratory experiments, neither SAL nor FF has been shown to have anti-inflammatory effects in individuals with asthma,[138,139] although preliminary evidence suggests that LABAs might have some mild anti-inflammatory effects when given in combination with ICS (see the section 'Combination inhalers', p. 15) as a result of inadvertent potentiation of the effects of the ICS.[140] The main adverse effects of LABAs relate to their systemic activity (see the next section). Both drugs are relatively well tolerated at recommended doses but their therapeutic window is fairly narrow.[132]

Adverse events

Most AEs related to the use of LABAs are a result of systemic absorption (due to stimulation of beta$_2$ adrenoceptors in the heart, peripheral vasculature and skeletal muscle) and are dose-related. At standard doses, AEs such as tachycardia, increase in the QTc interval, hypokalaemia, hyperglycaemia and tremor are minimal in most individuals.[137] At higher doses (which may be relevant during an acute asthma attack), both SAL and FF produce dose-related effects on heart rate, diastolic and systolic blood pressure, QTc interval and plasma potassium levels.[132]

Tolerance

Tolerance to the effects of regular LABA exposure, as a result of down-regulation of beta$_2$ adrenoceptors, may result in a diminution of response and associated worsening of disease control. This has been the subject of much basic and clinical research.[141–146] Whereas down-regulation of beta$_2$ adrenoceptors has been demonstrated in laboratory studies, most large clinical trials of LABAs have shown that tolerance to the bronchodilator effects of LABAs is not a significant clinical problem.[136] Tolerance to the bronchoprotective effects of LABAs against bronchoconstrictor stimuli such as methacholine challenge or exercise has been demonstrated in clinical studies.[147–150] Although bronchoconstrictor challenges are considered to be a surrogate for conditions during an asthma exacerbation, whether these laboratory-conducted studies are relevant to the everyday treatment of asthma with LABAs is unclear. There is also some evidence to

suggest that during regular LABA therapy there might be a reduced response to SABAs, although some of the studies in this area are difficult to interpret.[136,137]

Combination inhalers

Pharmacology

LABAs and ICS affect different aspects of asthma control; several studies have demonstrated the superiority of the combination of agents over increasing the dose of ICS.[151–153] Whether the combined effect is additive or synergistic (i.e. the combined effect is greater than the sum of the effects due to the individual agents) has been the subject of much research, both basic and clinical, and remains controversial.[154–156]

There are no apparent differences in systemic pharmacodynamics or pharmacokinetics when inhaled SAL and FP are given separately or in combination.[157]

Effect of LABAs on life-threatening asthma attacks and asthma-related deaths

Concerns have been raised in the literature regarding the potential association between treatment with a LABA and an increased risk of death due to asthma. This association, however, has remained uncertain, since it can be suggested that a high level of $beta_2$ agonist use is probably directly correlated with severity of asthma, and that those with more severe asthma are at greater risk of death.[158] Two post-marketing surveillance studies have therefore assessed the safety of SAL and salbutamol versus either each other or placebo,[159,160] and the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has re-analysed data from three clinical trials[161,162] submitted in support of the approval of Foradil Aerolizer for marketing in the USA.[163] Only one trial has assessed the association between LABA use and life-threatening asthma attacks in a paediatric population. This trial was of FF. No trials have been conducted in children with SAL alone.

Salmeterol Nationwide Surveillance (SNS) study

The SNS study conducted in the UK in 1990–1, randomised 25,180 patients with asthma who were considered to require regular bronchodilator treatment.[159] Patients were randomised to receive either SAL 50 µg twice daily (n = 16,787) or salbutamol 200 µg four times daily (n = 8393) in combination with their previously prescribed asthma drugs for 16 weeks. Approximately three-quarters of the patients were taking either an oral or ICS. The incidence of drug-related serious AEs was similar in both groups (1.19% versus 1.15%, respectively), but a significantly lower rate of severe, non-fatal asthma-related AEs was observed in the SAL group compared with the salbutamol group (9.9% versus 1.6%, respectively). The incidence of the combined trial end-point of respiratory and asthma-related deaths was not significantly different between the SAL and salbutamol treatment groups (0.07% versus 0.02%, respectively).[159]

Salmeterol Multicentre Asthma Research Trial (SMART)

SMART was a randomised, placebo-controlled study that compared the effects of adding SAL with usual asthma therapy.[160] Patients were randomised to receive either SAL 42 µg twice daily via an MDI or placebo twice daily for 28 weeks. The planned safety interim analysis was conducted after 26,355 patients had been randomised. At this point, the trial was terminated as it was found that the overall rate of death was higher in patients treated with SAL compared with placebo. The interim analysis indicated that the occurrence of the primary outcome (combined respiratory-related deaths or life-threatening asthma attacks) was low and not significantly different between the groups. However, there was a small but significant increase in respiratory-related deaths (24 versus 11) and asthma-related deaths (13 versus three) in patients receiving SAL compared with placebo. Further *post hoc* analysis showed that compared with placebo, a higher rate of asthma-related deaths occurred in the SAL group in both white (0.01 versus 0.07%) and African Americans (0.04 versus 0.31%). However, the overall estimates of excess deaths attributable to SAL were greater in the African American trial patients due to a higher event rate. It was also observed that the occurrence of asthma-related deaths and life-threatening experiences was similar in both groups in those patients using ICS at baseline (16 versus 13, respectively). However, overall the trial was not designed or conducted in a manner that allows for any conclusions to be drawn regarding whether or not ICS significantly modify the risk of death or experiencing a life-threatening episode purportedly associated with the use of SAL.[160]

Combined FF trials

Three pivotal randomised, placebo-controlled, double-blind trials submitted to the FDA by Novartis Pharmaceuticals in support of the approval of Foradil Aerolizer for marketing in the USA have been assessed for reports of serious asthma exacerbations.[161,162] Two of the trials were conducted in adults and one in a paediatric population. The two 12-week trials that were

conducted in adults compared the effects of FF 12 µg twice daily or 24 µg twice daily with either albuterol 180 µg four times daily or placebo. Both the 12 and 24 µg twice daily doses of FF were significantly more beneficial in terms of improvement in the primary end-point of FEV_1 at the 12-week follow-up. Neither of the trials showed a statistically significant benefit for FF 24 µg twice daily compared with FF 12 µg twice daily. However, the rate of serious asthma exacerbations was higher in the FF 24 µg twice daily dose group compared with the groups receiving placebo or albuterol or the group randomised to 12 µg twice daily of FF. In the two 12-week trials in adults/adolescents, 9 patients in the FF 24 µg twice daily group experienced a serious asthma exacerbation, all of which required hospitalisation. One patient died due to a cardiorespiratory arrest. In comparison, two placebo group patients experienced a serious but non-fatal asthma exacerbation, both of which required hospitalisation. In the trial that was conducted in a paediatric population for 1 year, 11 patients in the FF 24 µg twice daily group had a serious non-fatal asthma exacerbation compared with eight patients in the FF 12 µg twice daily group and no patients in the placebo group.

Summary of the risk of mortality or serious asthma exacerbation associated with LABA use
The results from trials and post-marketing surveillance studies provide conflicting evidence on any increased risk of mortality or serious asthma exacerbations associated with the use of a LABA. The majority of prospective trials show a decrease in exacerbation rates with the use of a LABA either in addition to an ICS or used alone. Additionally, no significant excess in mortality or the rate of severe exacerbations is generally observed. However, the majority of these trials are relatively short term and are usually not powered to detect relatively rare AEs. In contrast, post-marketing surveillance studies have showed mixed results regarding an increased risk of either severe AEs or mortality with LABA use. The results of the SNS[159] indicated that there were fewer severe non-fatal AEs with the use of SAL compared with salbutamol, and there were no significant differences in the mortality rates between the groups. In contrast, the results of SMART[160] showed that there was a significantly higher rate of respiratory and asthma-related deaths in the SAL group compared with the placebo group. No difference in the primary composite outcome was observed between the groups. Likewise, the three trials that assessed the use of FF indicated that there is an excess risk of severe exacerbation associated with higher doses of FF (24 µg twice daily,) compared with either lower doses of FF (12 µg twice daily), albuterol or placebo.

Overall, it is difficult to quantify the excess risk of severe exacerbation associated with the use of either SAL or FF, but it appears to be reasonably rare. However, the degree to which this reflects the use of a LABA alone, and may be attenuated by the use of combination ICS plus LABA therapy warrants further investigation in future post-marketing surveillance studies.

FDA actions on the use of LABAs. The FDA has recently asked for a 'black box' warning to appear on the labels of products containing SAL. The labelling includes a warning about a small, but significant, increased risk of life-threatening asthma episodes or asthma-related deaths with the use of SAL. A similar warning has also been included in the prescribing information. The labelling for FF remains unchanged.

Economic aspects of asthma

The research literature on economic aspects of asthma is large and diverse. Although it is dominated by economic evaluations comparing the cost-effectiveness of alternative treatments for asthma, it also includes cost-of-illness studies, cost analyses of particular treatments, longitudinal studies, regression analyses of claims databases and other studies to elicit patient preferences about different types of treatment and care provision.

Our aim in the following sections is to (1) give a broad overview of those economic aspects of asthma that have been identified in the research literature, focusing especially on studies conducted in the UK and/or focusing on asthma in children, and (2) attempt to identify the key causal relationships and trade-offs that seem to exist between resource use and the nature of chronic and acute asthma in children, in order to characterise best the current decision problem and model structure. It is not, therefore, intended to be comprehensive in terms of either the economic issues covered or the research literature included on each issue.

NHS cost impacts of asthma

Children with asthma place various demands on the NHS budget, ranging from the cost of prescribed asthma medications to various levels of health service use [e.g. GP and nurse consultations, Accident and Emergency (A&E) department visits and hospital admissions]. There is some evidence that children with asthma place

relatively greater demands on health services than adults with asthma.

Cost-of-illness studies of asthma consistently show relatively high 'indirect costs' (including, for example, the estimated cost of lost days of work or school) compared with the direct healthcare costs of service use.[164] They sometimes also show the dominant role of people with severe asthma in generating the bulk of asthma-related heathcare costs.

Gupta and colleagues have published the most recent well-conducted cost-of-illness study of asthma in the UK.[165] Overall, they estimated that the cost to the NHS of asthma in 2000 was £754 million, of which 78.8% (£594 million) was due to community-dispensed prescriptions, 12.7% (£96 million) was due to GP consultations and 8.4% (£63 million) was due to hospital admissions. This contrasts with most international studies, in which hospital costs account for a higher proportion of the costs associated with healthcare use.[164] Of the NHS costs associated with hospital admissions, over 86% (£54.7 million) were due to non-elective admissions (i.e. probably to treat asthma exacerbations). More recent estimates by the UK's Lung and Asthma Information Agency (and cited in the Asthma UK Cymru report '*Asthma in Wales today*') suggest that this cost to the NHS has increased to £889 million annually.[166] In a different study, cited in the same Asthma UK report, difficult-to-control asthma was estimated to cost the NHS £680 million per year.

Other data in the study by Gupta and colleagues suggest that, compared with children, adults (aged 15 years and over) contribute proportionately less to both primary care and secondary care NHS costs (*Table 4*). Among adults there was one hospital admission for asthma for every 13–15 GP consultations (for asthma), whereas among children there was an asthma-related hospital admission for every eight GP consultations.

The Prescriptions Cost Analysis database[167] details the number and cost of all prescriptions dispensed in the community in England. Listing of drug classes (by 317 BNF subparagraphs) shows that expenditure in 2005 on corticosteroids for respiratory conditions cost the NHS £436 million. Although only 15th in terms of the number of prescriptions, this is the third largest component of the total cost of community-dispensed drugs in England (after lipid-regulating drugs £625 million and proton pump inhibitors £446 million). Corticosteroids for respiratory conditions cost the NHS more than double the amount spent on many other major drug classes, such as angiotensin-converting enzyme inhibitors, antipsychotic drugs and intermediate and long-term insulins.

Of the £436 million spent on respiratory corticosteroids, £276 million was spent on combination inhalers (Symbicort and Seretide) (*Figure 6*).

Effective drug treatment for asthma relies upon the correct use of various inhaler devices (see the section 'Devices', p. 9). It is therefore conspicuous that the cost of related education and support has usually not been included in economic analyses comparing drug treatments (for example, respiratory nurse education on the correct use of pMDIs). This omission may be particularly important in younger age groups.

Cost to individuals with asthma, their carers and society

Financial cost of medicines

Asthma is not a condition exempt from NHS prescription charges although, as children aged under 16 years are exempt from all charges, they will not be required to pay for asthma medications. The financial cost of medicines should therefore not be a factor in children not receiving their prescribed dose of medication.

TABLE 4 *GP consultations and hospital admissions for asthma in the UK*

Age group (years)	Weekly number of GP consultations (per 100,000 in age group) in 2002	Annual number of hospital admissions (per 100,000 in age group) in 2000–1
0–14	46	292
15–44	25	84
45+	21	83

Source: Gupta and colleagues.[165]

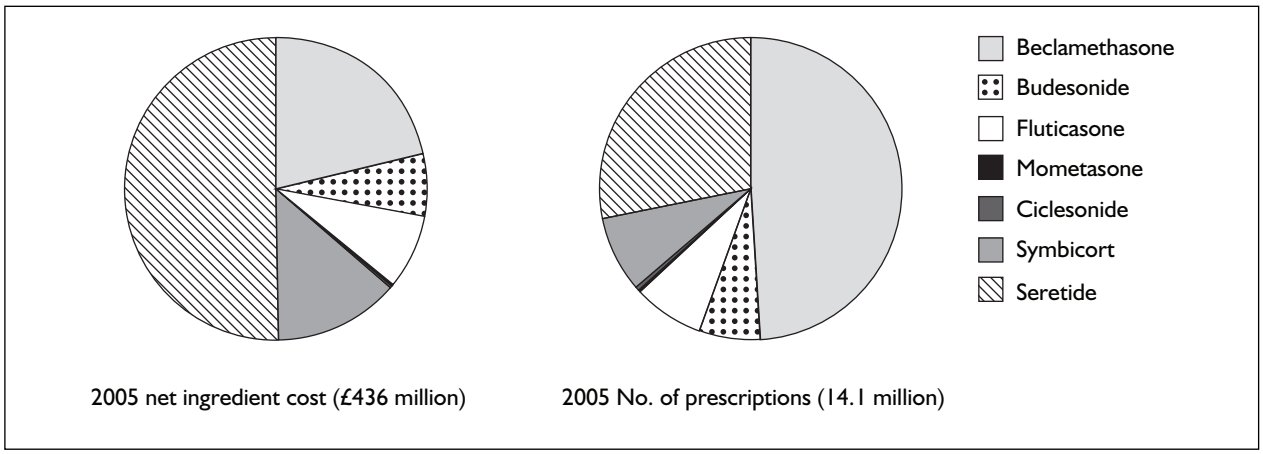

FIGURE 6 *Number and cost of community-dispensed prescriptions for ICS in England 2005. Source: NHS Health and Social Care Information Centre.*[167]

Other financial costs

Economic evaluations and cost-of-illness studies have not usually measured the use of resources such as medical equipment and consumables to support asthma self-medication and self-monitoring (such as nebulisers, inhalers and peak flow meters).[168] People with asthma also inevitably have to pay more of the various costs of attending more frequent primary care or hospital consultations, for example for travel, car parking and child care.

Indirect costs to individuals with asthma, carers and society

Cost-of-illness studies in a number of countries suggest that a significant proportion, usually 50% or more, of all costs due to asthma are due to the 'indirect costs' of lost days at work (or school), which may be estimated by asthma morbidity and treatment, and/or by premature deaths due to asthma.[164] Adults may lose work days as a result of their own asthma, or due to looking after children or other dependents with asthma. Two early studies estimated the annual number of working days lost due to asthma in the UK to be 5.7 or 7 million, corresponding to an estimated 50% and 90%, respectively, of all asthma costs.[169,170]

Other time costs of individuals with asthma and carers include healthy time lost (either work or leisure), the time that individuals with asthma put into the process of receiving healthcare and the time that carers put into caring for friends and relatives with asthma.[171] Reduced school attendance due to poor asthma control may also lead to a reduction in the educational level achieved and hence the future earning potential of individuals. These costs are in principle measurable, but much harder to value; for example, there is debate surrounding whether some 'time costs', such as lost leisure time, should be counted as a reduction in quality of life or as a monetary input.

A costing study by Stevens and colleagues, in the context of a UK-based RCT, estimated the mean annual costs per family with preschool children with asthma to be £562 (comprising £32 for family-borne costs, £47 for lost non-waged time, £55 for lost waged time and £428 for health service costs; 1999 costs).[172] Approximately half of the family-borne costs were due to 'regular family expenditure' (such as extra heating and childminder costs for caring at home), and one-third were associated with inpatient stays. Most of the families' non-waged time costs were due to attending primary care consultations or inpatient stays. In contrast, two-thirds of waged time cost was associated with inpatient stays. Also, a study into the loss of work days by caregivers, for French children with persistent asthma (GINA grade 2+, aged 6–16 years), showed that almost one-third of caregivers lost work days during the study year. About 13% of caregivers lost more than 5 days.[173]

Healthcare resource use and asthma severity

There are some published studies which have specifically examined the relationship between asthma severity and resource use and costs. However, we are aware of few UK-based studies that have studied this relationship. Nevertheless, the positive association between asthma severity, whether defined by GINA class or other methods, and healthcare costs seems strong in a variety of health systems.[174,175]

A study of 713 British children (0–15 years old, identified with respiratory symptoms through a postal survey to parents in 1993), 381 of whom were identified as 'likely asthmatics', examined the incidence of medical consultations for different reasons.[176] In a 2-year reference period, higher respiratory symptom and allergy history scores were associated with higher proportions of children having medical consultations (for upper and lower respiratory conditions), higher proportions having home visits and higher proportions receiving respiratory prescriptions. These associations remained statistically significant when data for children aged under 5 years were analysed separately. The 381 children who were 'likely asthmatics' had 934 GP consultations for a respiratory problem during the 2 years (a mean of 1.23 consultations per child per year). Unfortunately, this study did not distinguish routine/review consultations from urgent or patient-initiated consultations in primary care. The investigators did, however, highlight the very low rates of secondary care consultation for respiratory problems, an indication that in the UK most exacerbations are managed at home or with the support of primary care services.

Laforest and colleagues, in a 1-year study of various factors amongst 261 French children with asthma (aged 6–16 years), used clear definitions of asthma severity and control in the same analysis.[177] Interestingly they found that **within severity classes**, there was only an association between the cost of medical resource use and asthma symptom control for children with severe asthma; for children with mild and moderate asthma severity (in the 6-month prestudy period) there was no significant association between control and asthma costs.

Healthcare resource use and asthma symptom control

Although some asthma medication is prescribed as prophylactic therapy, and some asthma-related healthcare consultations are for routine clinical reviews, a sizeable proportion of medication use and many consultations occur in response to worsening symptoms. It is therefore possible that there might be a strong relationship between degree of asthma (symptom) control and resource use. As a result, the level of use of healthcare resources is sometimes suggested as a possible measure of effectiveness of asthma treatments.[168]

A key indicator of poor symptom control is a greater frequency of use of reliever medication (e.g. inhaled salbutamol), which has implications for medication costs. Also, anecdotal reports suggest that poor asthma symptom control may prompt better adherence to prophylactic medication.

The key driver of the higher costs of poor symptom control appears to the resource consequences of asthma exacerbations.

Exacerbations and healthcare resource use

Asthma exacerbations (or asthma 'attacks') are one of the key acute events which lead to the consumption of additional medications or to patient-initiated healthcare consultations. They are also the likely cause of more expensive types of asthma-related healthcare use, such as A&E attendances and hospital admissions.

For example, in a UK-wide cohort study of 12,203 people with asthma followed for 1 year, those who experienced an attack incurred over three times as much healthcare costs as those who did not (£381 versus £108, 1997 NHS costs).[178] Further breakdown of these costs showed that most of this difference was due to hospital stays (£169 versus £7, over the year) and medication costs (£129 versus £75).

It should be noted that many of these published studies predate the existence of NHS Direct, NHS Walk-in Centres and GP out-of-hours cooperatives. In the UK, these services now provide either a new pathway to some of the more long-standing providers of acute care (e.g. GPs, A&E departments), or provide emergency care and advice in their own right. It is possible that these services, by being better publicised and more accessible than traditional models of healthcare delivery, have made it easier for people with asthma to obtain care or advice when they experience symptoms or have other asthma-related queries.

Healthcare resource use and other factors

In addition to asthma severity and level of asthma symptom control, there are other published studies which have documented a relationship between asthma-related resource use and:

- co-morbidities (such as allergic rhinitis, diabetes)[179,180]
- sex (females being more likely to use care for asthma)
- self-management programmes
- health service organisation and accessibility (e.g. balance of primary care provided by nurses versus GPs, availability and use of telephone advice lines)[180,181]
- HRQoL.[180,182,183]

Summary points on economic impact of asthma

- Asthma has considerable economic impacts beyond the resources used in providing healthcare. These impacts comprise days lost from work by individuals with asthma and their families, and days lost from school among children.
- Of the costs incurred for providing healthcare for children with asthma, a high proportion is associated with the use of hospital services. Asthma exacerbations, both their frequency and their severity, appear to be the major driver of the cost of using health services amongst children and adults.
- As asthma severity increases and as level of asthma control decreases, the costs to the health system increase. There may be interaction effects, but we are not aware that they have been explicitly studied (e.g. poorly controlled severe asthma may lead to more consumption of healthcare resources than the separate effects added). People with difficult-to-control asthma may be another subgroup which generate more healthcare costs, but they have been less studied.
- Although there has been a great deal of research to examine the cost-effectiveness of switching to alternative treatments for people with poorly controlled asthma, there do not appear to have been any economic evaluations of stepping down treatment in individuals whose asthma is well controlled.
- In the last 10 years there have been considerable changes in the range of available NHS services for people with asthma, especially those for urgent care and advice – such as NHS Direct, Walk-in Centres and GP after-hours cooperatives. These may have changed the pathways by which people access healthcare, and perhaps also altered the balance of self-care and formal care. In addition, the cost and cost-effectiveness of allergen avoidance strategies to reduce asthma symptoms have not been studied.
- There are some dynamic inter-relationships between resource use (costs) and the level of actual or perceived symptom control. For example, patient charges for medication may be a factor in poor concordance with prophylactic therapy, and therefore symptom deterioration (and ultimately higher healthcare costs). Also, the lack of perceived symptoms may encourage a gradual reduction in the use of prophylactic therapies, resulting in a costly exacerbation of asthma symptoms.

Chapter 2
Decision problems

Aims and objectives

Assessment aim

The aim of this health technology assessment is to assess the clinical and cost-effectiveness of ICS, used alone or in combination with a LABA, for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under the age of 12 years and to provide guidance to the NHS in England and Wales.

Objectives

The objectives were as follows:

- to identify, appraise and synthesise, where appropriate, the current evidence base which addresses the specific research questions on clinical effectiveness listed above
- to identify the costs associated with the different treatments
- to identify, appraise and synthesise, where appropriate, the current evidence base which addresses the specific research questions on cost-effectiveness listed above
- to provide estimates of cost-effectiveness, where possible, of the different treatment options.

Definition of the decision problems

There are three ICS available as licensed preparations in this population: BDP, BUD and FP. The drugs may all be administered via different devices, including pMDIs, with or without a spacer, and DPIs. Assessment of the effect of device on the dose of corticosteroid delivered to the airways and, by extension, the effect of the device on the clinical effectiveness of ICS, is not included in this report. Similarly, the effect of the propellant (CFC versus HFA) used in the MDIs is not considered.

In addition, two of the corticosteroids under consideration are available as licensed preparations in combination with LABA: FP used in combination with SAL (Seretide) and BUD used in combination with FF (Symbicort).

For each ICS, the appropriate comparators are the other ICS. For each combination inhaler, the appropriate comparators are ICS alone, ICS and LABA in separate inhalers and the other combination inhaler.

The BTS/SIGN Guideline[1] is the context in which the decision problem is set, outlined in the section 'Asthma management in the UK' (p. 5). Using the steps in the Guideline, the following specific review questions were identified:

Q1. At low doses (200–400 µg BDP per day or equivalent), which is the most clinically and cost-effective of the three ICS? (Step 2 of the Guideline)

The relevant population for which this intervention should be considered is children with asthma who have been treated at Step 1 or Step 2 of the guidelines [i.e. they have either not been treated with corticosteroids previously or have received low doses (as defined above) of ICS].

Q2. At high doses (400–800 µg BDP per day or equivalent), which is the most clinically and cost-effective of the three ICS? (Step 4 of the Guideline)

The relevant population for which this intervention should be considered is children with asthma who have been treated at Steps 2–3 of the Guideline (i.e. they have been treated with ICS previously in conjunction with other treatments such as LABAs). They should not be steroid-naïve.

Q3. Which is the more clinically and cost-effective approach to introducing a LABA into a treatment regimen:
   (a) to increase the dose of ICS alone or to add a LABA to treatment with ICS? (Steps 2–3 of the guideline)
   (b) to continue with an ICS alone or to add a LABA to treatment with a similar dose of ICS using a combination inhaler? (Steps 2–3 of the Guideline)

The relevant population for which this intervention should be considered is children with asthma who have been treated at Step 2 of the Guideline (i.e. they have been treated with low-dose ICS previously). They should not be steroid-naïve.

Question 3a is viewed as the more clinically relevant of the two sub-questions, because if patients remain uncontrolled on lower dose ICS alone, treatment protocols in line with the BTS/SIGN Guideline would indicate that either the ICS dose is increased, or a LABA is added to the lower dose of ICS. However, the literature searches conducted for the present assessment also identified trials in which a LABA was added to the ICS treatment regimen without the dose of ICS alone being increased. Although this treatment strategy is not in line with that advocated in the BTS/SIGN Guideline for completeness, these studies are included in the clinical effectiveness review as a separate sub-question. This sub-question is not addressed in the cost-effectiveness evaluation.

Q4. Which is the more clinically and cost-effective treatment:
   (a) FP and SAL in a combination inhaler or given in separate inhalers?
   (b) BUD and FF in a combination inhaler or given in separate inhalers?

Q5. Which is the more clinically and cost-effective treatment: FP/SAL in a combination inhaler or BUD/FF in a combination inhaler? (Step 3 of the Guideline)

The relevant population for which these interventions should be considered is children with asthma who have been treated at Step 2 of the Guideline (i.e. they have been treated with low-dose ICS previously). They should not be steroid-naïve.

Within the context of the BTS/SIGN Guideline, it is generally accepted that the following are clinically equivalent doses: BDP 400 µg, BUD 400 µg, and FP 200 µg. Studies which compare these drugs at these dose ratios, delivered through similar devices, are therefore the most appropriate method for testing this hypothesis.

The clinical effectiveness of treatments for asthma can be assessed against a wide variety of outcome measures, which can be broadly divided into the following categories:

- objective measures of lung function (e.g. FEV_1, PEF)
- symptoms [e.g. nocturnal waking, morning cough, symptom-free days (SFDs) and symptom-free nights (SFNs), symptom scores)
- use of rescue medication (e.g. SABAs, short courses of oral corticosteroids)
- acute exacerbations, defined in a number of ways (e.g. increase in symptoms, increased use of rescue medication or contact with health services)
- AEs
- HRQoL
- mortality.

Although there is some evidence of the minimally perceived change in PEF considered to be clinically relevant by patients, for the majority of the above outcome measures it is unclear for which, if any, there is a generally accepted definition of the minimum level of change that is clinically significant.

Chapter 3

Assessment of clinical effectiveness

Methods for reviewing effectiveness

A peer-reviewed protocol was published in May 2006 on the website of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) and circulated amongst the consultees, outlining the agreed scope and methodology for this assessment.[184] This was based on the scope of the appraisal as published by NICE.[185]

The scope proposed that the assessment be conducted within the context of the stepwise approach as advocated by the BTS/SIGN Guideline.[1] As far as possible, the contents of this Guideline have been taken into account in the assessment of clinical effectiveness.

An over-arching philosophy of the assessment of clinical effectiveness was the need to capitalise, where possible, on existing evidence syntheses of the effectiveness of ICS and LABAs for chronic asthma. A number of systematic reviews have been published in The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews, some of which are relevant to the scope of this assessment,[186–190] although their aims and inclusion criteria vary in places from those of the current assessment. Where relevant, we have built upon the data presented in those reviews.

Identification of studies

A search strategy for electronic bibliographic databases was devised and tested by an experienced information scientist (Appendix 3). Once finalised, it was applied to a number of databases, including The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR); The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials; Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness (DARE); the NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED); MEDLINE (Ovid); EMBASE (Ovid); National Research Register; Current Controlled Trials; ISI Proceedings (Web of Knowledge); Science Citation Index (Web of Knowledge); and BIOSIS.

Searches were run up to February/March 2006, and were restricted to studies published in English. An update search was conducted in October 2006 to identify any relevant studies published since the original search.

The drug manufacturers' submissions to NICE, which we received in August 2006, were also searched for potentially relevant trials.

All identified studies were downloaded into a Reference Manager database for storage and retrieval as necessary. A keywording system was devised to enable each reference to be categorised according to pre-specified inclusion and exclusion criteria (see the next section).

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria were specified *a priori* based on the scope issued by NICE,[185] as agreed in the published protocol.[184]

Intervention

Trials reporting evaluations of the following ICS were included:

- BDP
- BUD
- FP.

Trials reporting evaluations of the following ICS combined with LABAs in the same inhaler (i.e. combination inhalers) were included:

- BUD/FF (in children aged over 6 years)
- FP/SAL (as xinafoate) (in children aged over 4 years).

Trials reporting ICS delivered by pMDIs and DPIs were included; those using nebulisers were excluded.

To be included, the intervention had to last for more than 4 weeks.

Comparators

- The ICS were compared with each other.
- The combination inhalers were compared with each other and with ICS only. They were also compared with ICS and LABAs administered in separate inhalers.
- Trials testing only different doses of the same agent were not included as these were outside the scope of the assessment. (NB. Cochrane systematic reviews of different doses of BUD,[191] BDP[192] and FP[193] are available). Trials which

compared more than one dose of an ICS with a different ICS were included.
- Trials testing different drugs by different inhalers or propellants were not included (e.g. DPI versus pMDI or HFA pMDI versus CFC pMDI). The role of delivery device has been assessed by a published systematic review,[194,195] which found that there was no evidence for differences in effectiveness between different types of hand-held inhaler. However, some clinical trials of different ICS identified in our literature search were specifically designed to demonstrate superiority of one device over another, or in some cases that one inhaler device can be used to achieve comparable asthma control at a lower ICS dose than an alternative device. For this reason, we chose to limit the review to comparisons of different ICS via the same type of inhaler or propellant in order to reduce any potential confounding associated with devices.
- Trials reporting comparisons between ICS and placebo were sought and included in order potentially to support economic modelling (e.g. to provide estimates for model parameters). Details of these studies are not reported in the clinical effectiveness review.

Types of studies
- Fully published RCTs or systematic reviews of RCTs were considered. Double-blinding was not a prerequisite for inclusion, although blinding was assessed as part of critical appraisal (see the Section 'Critical appraisal strategy', p. 25). Indicators of a 'systematic' review include explicit search strategy, inclusion criteria, data extraction and assessment of quality.
- Trials reported in abstracts or conference presentations from 2004 onwards were retrieved; however, their details were not extracted, critically appraised or analysed (however, details were extracted where an abstract was available which provided data supplementary to a fully published trial report of a particular study; this occurred in a handful of cases).
- Where unpublished full trial reports were available (e.g. as supplied by the drug manufacturers in their submissions to NICE), these were included.

Population
- Children aged under 12 years diagnosed with chronic asthma (NB. the mean age of the study population had to be 12 years or under). Studies in which the patient group was asthmatics with a specific related co-morbidity (e.g. cystic fibrosis) were not included.
- Studies reporting the treatment of acute exacerbations of asthma were not included.
- Trials reporting the effectiveness of ICS with LABAs were only included if the patients had been previously treated with an ICS. Trials assessing the effectiveness of initiating treatment with ICS in combination with LABAs in steroid-naïve patients are not within the context of the BTS/SIGN Guideline.

Outcomes
At the screening stage, studies reporting one or more of the following outcomes were included:

- objective measures of lung function (e.g. FEV_1, PEF)
- symptoms (e.g. SFDs and SFNs)
- incidence of mild and severe acute exacerbations (e.g. mild – requiring unscheduled contact with healthcare professional; severe – requiring hospitalisation, systemic corticosteroids or visit to A&E department).
- use of systemic corticosteroids
- AEs of treatment
- HRQoL
- mortality.

A list of specific measures for each of these outcomes was devised for the data analysis (see the section 'Narrative synthesis', p. 26).

Titles and abstracts of studies identified by the searches were screened by one reviewer based on the above inclusion/exclusion criteria. A second reviewer checked a random 10% of these. Any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and involvement of a third reviewer where necessary.

Full papers of studies included on title or abstract were requested for further assessment. All full papers were screened independently by one reviewer and checked by a second. Any discrepancies were resolved by discussion with involvement of a third reviewer where necessary.

All included papers were keyworded in the Reference Manager database as to their intervention and comparator, and were coded for the synthesis framework (see the section 'Methods of data synthesis, p. 25) to allow efficient retrieval of subsets of studies for analysis.

As far as possible, all included papers describing a particular trial were linked together to form a 'set' of studies. One of the papers (usually the seminal journal article reporting the key efficacy and safety

results) was designated the primary publication, with the remaining papers classed as secondary publications.

All included trials were cross-referenced with the relevant Cochrane reviews to ascertain whether or not they had already been included in the reviews.[186–190] Those that were included were keyworded in our Reference Manager database accordingly. Conversely, the bibliographies of included studies in the relevant Cochrane reviews were cross-referenced with our list of included studies and our inclusion criteria to ascertain whether there were any relevant studies in those reviews that had not been identified by our search.

Data extraction strategy

All trials, except those included in the relevant Cochrane reviews, were fully data extracted. Data were entered into a structured template by one reviewer and checked by a second. Any discrepancies between the data extracted and the original trial report were resolved and the data extraction finalised (see Appendix 4). Data on the studies that met our inclusion criteria and which were also included in the Cochrane reviews are available from the reviews themselves.[186–190]

Critical appraisal strategy

The methodological quality of the trials supplemental to the Cochrane reviews was assessed according to criteria specified by the Centre for Reviews and Dissemination (CRD)[196] (see Appendix 4). Quality was assessed by one reviewer and their judgements were checked by a second. Where there was disagreement, a third reviewer was consulted and a final judgement agreed. Judgements about the quality of the trials included in the Cochrane reviews can be found by consulting the relevant review.[186–190]

Methods of data synthesis

Results of the included trials were synthesised narratively (see the next section) with use of meta-analyses where possible and appropriate (see the section 'Meta-analyses, p. 26'). A framework was devised for the analysis and presentation of results, based on the stepwise approach recommended in the BTS/SIGN Guideline.[1]

The review questions were as follows:

1. Which ICS is the most effective at low doses [200–400 µg/day BDP/BUD equivalent (for FP, the equivalent doses are 100–200 µg/day (children aged over 4 years)]? (Step 2 of the Guideline)
2. Which ICS is the most effective at high doses [400–800 µg/day BDP/BUD equivalent (for FP, high dose is up to 200–400 µg/day (children aged over 4 years)]? (Step 4 of the guideline)
3. Which is more effective: an ICS or a combination inhaler containing an ICS and a LABA? (Step 2/Step 3 of the Guideline)
   This question is subdivided based on two categories of trials:
   (a) Where the dose of the ICS is higher when used alone, compared to the dose in the combination inhaler.
   (b) Where the dose of the ICS is the same/similar in both treatments
4. Which is more effective: an ICS and a LABA administered in separate inhalers or in a combination inhaler?
5. Which is the more effective: a combination inhaler containing FF and BUD, or a combination inhaler containing SAL and FP?

Each included trial was coded according to which of the review questions it was relevant. For example, a trial comparing 200 µg/day of BDP with 200 µg/day of BUD was assigned to review question 1, as it evaluated low-dose ICS. Some trials were relevant to more than one review question as they tested multiple doses of inhaled steroids, some of which were relevant to review question 1 (i.e. low-dose) and some of which were relevant to question 2 (i.e. high-dose).

Each review question was stratified according to a number of pair-wise comparisons of the inhaled steroids and, where relevant, LABAs (where evidence allows). In addition, some trials were included in more than one pair-wise comparison as they evaluated two or more ICS (e.g. a three-arm trial comparing FP with BUD and BDP).

Trials were also divided according to whether or not a parallel-group or cross-over design was used. It is generally considered inappropriate to pool these designs together within meta-analyses.[197] Where necessary, trials were then further divided according to the nominal dose ratio employed, following the approach used in the Cochrane review of FP compared with BUD or BDP.[187] Some trials aimed to test the equipotency of different inhaled steroids, particularly newer steroids such as FP compared with the older steroids such as BDP and BUD. Therefore, dose ratios of 1:2 or higher are common in the literature. Separate analysis of the ratios was necessary to reduce the risk of confounding associated with comparing trials with differing doses.

In summary, the framework comprised sets of trials grouped according to which review question, pair-wise comparison, study design and dose ratio they related. For example:

1. Review question1: low-dose ICS
   (a) pair-wise comparison: BDP versus FP
      (i) parallel-group trial 1:1 ratio
      (ii) parallel-group trial 1:2 ratio
      (iii) cross-over trial 1:1 ratio
      (iv) cross-over trial 1:2 ratio.

It was expected that this framework would result in generally smaller sets of studies in each analysis, as opposed to a larger set with potentially more statistical power to identify effects. However, a framework such as this was essential in order to embed the review within the context of the BTS/SIGN Guideline[1] (as stipulated in the scope for the appraisal issued by NICE) and to reduce the likelihood of confounding due to differences in trial design and dose ratio.

Narrative synthesis

As described above, the narrative synthesis comprises a framework whereby trials are summarised according to which review question, pair-wise comparison, study design and dose ratio they were relevant. The results sections are organised according to this framework.

Within each pair-wise comparison, all included trials were tabulated for their key characteristics, and described in the text (e.g. trial duration, patient profile, outcome measures, methodological quality). In addition, more detailed data on the trials are available in Appendix 4, for those trials which were supplemental to the Cochrane reviews and which underwent full data extraction. Further details of the remaining studies are available in the relevant Cochrane reviews. Each outcome measure is presented in turn and the key results are reported in the text.

There are numerous ways of measuring and reporting outcomes from asthma trials. For brevity, we report only the following measures:

- lung function – FEV_1 (litres); FEV % predicted; morning/evening PEF (litres per minute)
- symptoms – days/nights without symptoms; total daily symptom scores
- HRQoL – total HRQoL scores
- use of rescue medication – mean number of puffs per day of SABA
- exacerbations – number and/or rate of exacerbations, where the authors' definition of exacerbations is not covered by one of our existing outcomes.
- AEs – number and/or rate of AEs; number and/or rate of serious AEs; number and/or rate of withdrawals due to AEs; urinary/serum cortisol; BMD; growth.

Meta-analysis

The feasibility and appropriateness of meta-analysis were considered once narrative syntheses had been completed. The decision to pool was influenced by the likelihood that the trials were clinically homogeneous and that the necessary data were available. Potential clinical heterogeneity was assumed if there were differences between trials in

- dose
- disease severity
- treatment duration.

To some extent, the potential for clinical heterogeneity was reduced by virtue of the framework used for the review, whereby studies were grouped into sets according to whether a high or a low dose of ICS was used. Nonetheless, even within the low- and high-dose review questions the dose ranges can be relatively wide. It could also be argued that dose is a proxy for severity, with less severe asthma patients treated with lower doses, and vice versa, although this is a generalisation. It was therefore important to consider severity as a potential source of heterogeneity. Furthermore, the influence of trial duration cannot be discounted. Although trials lasting around 3 months are common, some are designed to evaluate longer term effects on asthma control and AEs. Such trials are likely to have differing aims and, consequently, if they appeared to be diverse in terms of the above factors, they were not pooled.

Results

Quantity and quality of research available

A total of 5175 records of publications were identified through literature searching. *Figure 7* shows the identification of published studies for inclusion in the systematic review of clinical effectiveness. Of the identified studies, 4368 were excluded on title and abstract. Full reports for the remaining 807 were requested for more in-depth screening. Of these, 34 records describing 25 studies were included. Searches for this report were combined with the accompanying report on

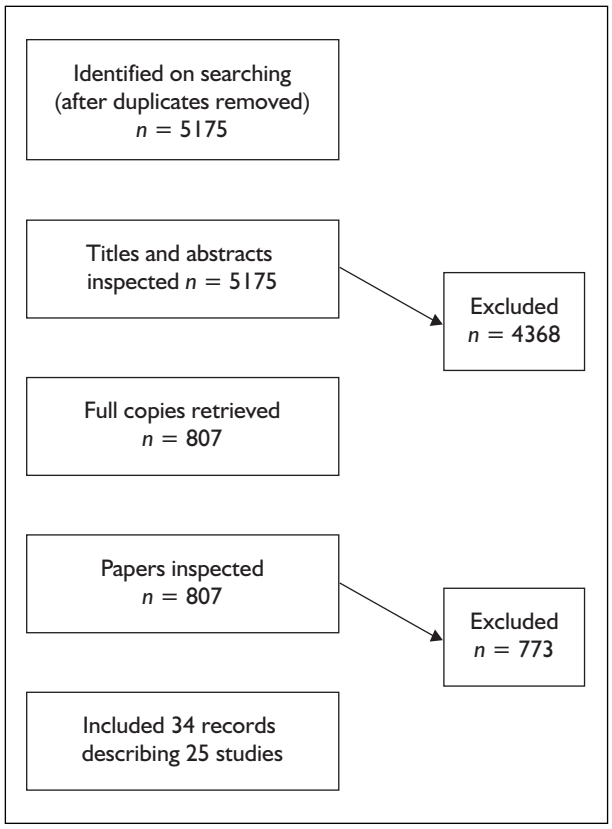

FIGURE 7 *Flowchart of identification of published studies for inclusion in the systematic review of clinical effectiveness*

ICS in adults and children aged 12 years and over. Consequently, a proportion of the 807 papers screened were included in that report.

Of the 25 studies:

- Three were conference abstracts published from 2004 onwards (bibliographic details of these are listed in Appendix 6).
- Six were systematic reviews (of which five were Cochrane reviews) (these are reported in the section 'Cochrane systematic reviews', p. 60).
- 16 were fully published RCTs (of which 12 had been included in the Cochrane reviews).

Updated searches conducted in October 2006 yielded a total of 245 records of publications, of which 26 were inspected on full report. Of these, two studies (one RCT, one systematic review) appear relevant and would be eligible for inclusion in any future update and their bibliographic details are listed in Appendix 5). In all but one of the 16 RCTs the mean age was under 12 years, in line with our inclusion criteria. The exception was the study by O'Byrne and colleagues,[198] in which mean age was 36 years (range 4–79 years). Approximately 12% of participants were under the age of 12 years and results for growth and cortisol levels are reported separately for this group. The age range in the RCTs varied, but was generally from 4 to 19 years. It should therefore be acknowledged that there is a slight overlap with some of the studies in adolescents over the age of 12 years included in the accompanying report on ICS in adults and children over the age of 12.[199] Notably absent from the evidence base are studies in children and infants aged under 4 years.

TABLE 5 *Breakdown of studies for review question 1 – low-dose ICS*

Pair-wise comparison	No. of RCTs included
BDP and BUD	1
FP and BDP	2
FP and BUD	2
Total	5

TABLE 6 *Breakdown of studies for review question 2 – high-dose ICS*

Pair-wise comparison	No. of RCTs included
BDP and BUD	1
FP and BDP	3
FP and BUD	3
Total	7

TABLE 7 *Breakdown of studies for review question 3a – ICS versus ICS + LABA (ICS dose higher when used alone)*

Pair-wise comparison	No. of RCTs included
BUD vs BUD + FF	1
Total	1

TABLE 8 *Breakdown of studies for review question 3b – ICS versus ICS + LABA (ICS dose similar in both treatments)*

Pair-wise comparison	No. of RCTs included
FP vs FP + SAL	1
BUD vs BUD + FF	1
Total	2

Tables 5–10 provide a breakdown of the number of RCTs for each pair-wise comparison between the three ICS within each review question. There are equal numbers of trials reporting on low- and high-dose ICS (seven in each case). There is very little evidence for the efficacy and safety of ICS in combination with LABAs.

TABLE 9 *Breakdown of studies for review question 4 – combination inhaler versus separate inhalers*

Pair-wise comparison	No. of RCTs included
FP/SAL (combination) vs FP + SAL (separate)	1
Total	1

TABLE 10 *Breakdown of studies for review question 5 – combination inhaler versus combination inhaler*

Pair-wise comparison	No. of RCTs included
FP/SAL (combination) vs BUD + FF (combination)	0
Total	0

The 16 RCTs are described in the following sections in terms of their characteristics and results.

Review question 1 – effectiveness of low-dose ICS

Low-dose ICS: BDP and BUD

Study characteristics

Only one RCT, published in 1988, evaluated the effects of BUD compared with BDP in children[200] (*Table 11*). It was a small, multi-centre study conducted in six centres in Denmark, and involving 41 children. The trial was a double-blind, parallel-group design, containing two arms.

The trial incorporated a stepwise increase in ICS, and consisted of three 4-week periods with successive daily doses of 200, 400 and 800 µg of either BDP or BUD. Thus, the comparison of the two drugs was at a dose ratio of 1:1 throughout the study. Although 800 µg is regarded as a high dose of BDP and BUD, the comparison by Bisgaard and colleagues[200] is included in this (low-dose) review question as opposed to question 2, because two-thirds of the treatment duration involved lower doses (200 and 400 µg), and effects of the higher dose would not have been independent of the preceding lower doses. The drugs were both delivered via an aerosol pMDI inhaler device (BDP was purchased commercially and it is not stated explicitly, but it can be deduced from the text that BUD was provided by AZ). The treatment period was 3 months in total (4 weeks for each of three successive doses).

Children who completed the trial were aged between 5 and 17 years, with a mean age of about 11 years. Although all the children were using SABAs and almost half were using theophylline daily, none had used ICS therapy during the preceding 6 months. The severity of asthma was not specifically stated and baseline FEV_1 % predicted was not reported.

The rationale of the study was primarily to evaluate the effect of ICS in varying doses on adrenal function (as an indicator of systemic effects). A secondary aim was to investigate whether BUD offered an improved ratio between the beneficial ICS effect and undesirable systemic activity compared to BDP. The primary outcome was a measure of adrenal function using biochemical measurements.

In terms of methodological quality, details of the randomisation procedure were not reported hence concealment of allocation was unknown. The study did not perform intention-to-treat (ITT) analysis as the analysis was only carried out on all children completing the trial ($n = 30$). The eligibility criteria were not adequately specified. The trial was double-blind although, due to the dose variation, the trial was blind to drug but not dose.

Results

Lung function

The study did not present any values for lung function. However, the authors reported that the morning and evening PEF was not different between treatment groups [presented as the average PEF during the last 10 days of the first trial period (200 µg/day)], nor did it change significantly with the increase in ICS dose ($p > 0.1$).

Symptoms

The trial did not report symptom scores as an outcome measure.

Use of rescue medication

As for lung function, the study did not present any data for rescue medication use, but did state that there were no differences between the two drugs. Similarly, the use of SABAs did not change significantly with the increase in ICS dose ($p > 0.1$).

Exacerbations

The trial did not report the incidence of asthma exacerbations as a specific outcome measure. However, two children withdrew from the study due to a severe exacerbation of asthma (one in each treatment group).

Adverse events

The authors stated that there were very few AEs in the two groups, with no dose-related trend. Six of

TABLE 11 *Characteristics of studies (BDP and BUD)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Bisgaard *et al.*, 1988[200]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Dose-escalation Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. BDP stepwise increased doses: 200, 400, 800 μg/daily 2. BUD stepwise increased doses: 200, 400, 800 μg/daily Successive doses (200, 400, 800 μg/d) were given for 4-week periods in succession with no wash-out between each dose. *Delivery device:* 1. pMDI (purchased commercially, no other details reported) 2. pMDI (Pulmicort, Astra Pharmaceutical[a]) *Duration:* 3 months *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 41 *Age range* 7–15 years *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* Not reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* None during previous 6 months	*Outcomes* Adrenal function evaluated by: 24-hour urinary free cortisol excretion urinary cortisol metabolites plasma cortisol 30 minutes post-125 μg i.v. tetracosactrin (nmol/l) PEF % predicted morning and evening Rescue SABA use AEs

[a] Not stated explicitly, deduced from the text.

the 11 children who withdrew from the study did so because of AEs (two BDP, four BUD).

There was no significant difference ($p = 0.207$) between treatments in suppression of diurnal urinary free cortisol when doses were ignored, whereas differences between doses were highly significant when treatment was ignored ($p = 0.004$). Data (extracted from a graph by the reviewers) indicate that the mean urinary free cortisol concentrations after the treatment with 200-, 400- and 800-µg doses, were (approximately) 82, 72 and 54 nmol/g, respectively, for BDP and 76, 56 and 69 nmol/g, respectively, for BUD. CIs or error bars were given for these data but cannot be interpreted as their units were ambiguous.

Summary

Only one small, multi-centre, parallel-group trial evaluated the effects of BUD compared with BDP in children. Treatment with increasing doses of BDP, but not BUD, resulted in a significant decline of adrenal function, but the overall effect on adrenal function did not differ significantly between the groups. The groups were also similar in terms of the effects on lung function (PEF), use of rescue medication and safety.

Low-dose ICS: FP and BDP

Study characteristics

There are two trials in this section, by Gustaffson and colleagues[201] and Rao and colleagues[202] (*Table 12*). Both trials were parallel-group studies, comparing FP 200 µg/day with BDP 400 µg/day (i.e. a dose ratio of 1:2). The studies both had two active treatment arms, but the study by Rao and colleagues[202] also had a placebo arm. The duration of the trials ranged from 6 weeks[201] to 20 months.[202] The six-week study by Gustafsson and colleagues[201] was a large multi-centre trial (32 centres in 11 countries) with 398 children aged from 4 to 19 years, who were inadequately controlled on current treatment. The other trial was smaller and the number of centres was not reported. Rao and colleagues[202] recruited 23 steroid-naïve children with moderately severe asthma aged 5–10 years.

Participants in both trials used an MDI and spacer (no further details about the devices were reported).

Both studies were described as being double-blind and randomised, but no details were given on the randomisation procedure, concealment of allocation or blinding. Only Gustafsson and colleagues[201] reported a power calculation (the outcome used was PEF) and neither of the trials stated that they used an ITT analysis. In the study by Rao and colleagues,[202] the three arms ran for 10 weeks. After this period, the placebo arm merged with the FP arm as it was considered unethical to continue the placebo for longer, thus breaking randomisation. Therefore, we only report results for the first 10 weeks, where data were available in the trial report. Unfortunately, the number of children originally randomised to the three groups was not stated; when merged there were 15 children in the FP arm and eight in the BDP arm.

The participants were similar at baseline in the study by Gustafsson and colleagues[201] and withdrawals were described (nine patients in total, four from the FP arm and five from the BDP arm). All patients in Rao and colleagues' study[202] completed the initial 10 weeks and were well matched (except for immunoglobulin E levels, which were significantly higher in the BDP group).

The overall aim of the study by Gustafsson and colleagues[201] was to compare the efficacy and safety of FP with BDP. Rao and colleagues[202] were predominantly interested in comparing the effect of FP with BDP on growth and bone turnover.

Results

All results refer to parallel 1:2 dose ratio comparisons. Meta-analysis was not possible due to different outcomes being reported in each study.

Lung function

FEV_1 (litres). FEV_1 at end-point (week 6) reported by Gustafsson and colleagues[201] was 2.19 litres for the FP group ($n = 190$) and 2.26 litres for the BDP group ($n = 198$), but it was not reported whether this difference between the groups was statistically significant. No data on FEV_1 during the first 10 weeks were given by Rao and colleagues.[202]

Only Gustafsson and colleagues[201] reported the FEV_1 change from baseline. This was 0.12 litres in the FP group and 0.15 litres in the BDP group, adjusted for baseline, age and country. Neither of these changes from baseline was statistically significant. It was not reported whether these changes from baseline differed significantly between the groups.

FEV_1 % predicted. The FEV_1 % predicted reported by Gustafsson and colleagues[201] at end-point (week 6) was 94.1% in the FP group

TABLE 12 *Characteristics of studies (FP and BDP)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Gustafsson *et al.*, 1993[201]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. FP 100 μg b.d. (daily total 200 μg) 2. BDP 200 μg b.d. (daily total 400 μg) *Delivery device:* 1, 2. MDI + large volume spacer (no further details about devices reported) *Duration:* 6 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks (usual medication)	*Number randomised* 398 1. 197 2. 201 *Mean age (range) (years)* 1. 10 (4–19) 2. 11 (4–18) *Mean baseline FEV_1 % predicted* 1. 88.9 2. 87.8 *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* Either received ICS up to 400 μg or received a bronchodilator, ketotifen or sodium cromoglycate but asthma inadequately controlled	*Outcomes* Change in FEV_1 (litres) Change in FEV_1 % predicted Change in clinic PEF % predicted Change in morning and evening PEF % predicted Diurnal variation in PEF % SFDs % SFNs % SABA-free days AEs
Rao *et al.*, 1999[202]	RCT Parallel-group Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. FP 100 μg b.d. (daily total 200 μg) 2. BDP 200 μg b.d. (daily total 400 μg) 3. Placebo (for 10 weeks before merging with the FP arm) *Delivery device:* 1, 2. MDI + spacer (no further details about devices reported) *Duration:* 20 months *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 23 (not broken down by group) *Mean (SEM) age (age) (years)* 1. 6.68 (0.57) 2. 6.93 (0.61) 3. 6.77 (0.61) *Mean (SEM) baseline FEV_1 % predicted* 1. 90.8 (4.7) 2. 79.3 (5.5) 3. 94.4 (4.7) *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* Steroid-naïve	*Outcomes* FEV_1 % predicted $FEF_{25–75\%}$ Post-exercise fall in FEV_1 Morning plasma cortisol Log PC20 for histamine (the provocative concentration of histamine causing a 20% fall in FEV_1) Daily asthma symptom score BMD by dual-energy X-ray absorptiometry Serum and urine markers of bone turnover Height assessment

SEM, standard error of the mean.

(n = 190) and 94.1% in the BDP group (n = 193). These identical mean values imply no difference between the groups (no statistics were reported for this comparison).

Rao and colleagues[202] presented the FEV_1 % predicted data in a graph, from which the data at 10 weeks have been extracted by the reviewers (after 10 weeks, the FP group was merged with the placebo group). In the FP group, the baseline mean ± standard error of the mean (SEM) was estimated to be 90 ± 10% and the end-point (10-week) value was 96 ± 12%. In the BDP group, the corresponding baseline and end-point values were 80 ± 12% and 81 ± 12%, respectively. No statistical tests of the difference between groups at 10 weeks are available.

Morning PEF (l/minute). In the study by Gustafsson and colleagues,[201] the mean baseline morning PEF and the change in morning PEF from baseline for the FP group were 318 and 24 l/minute, respectively. For the BDP group, the respective values were 329 and 19 l/minute. No variances or p-values for these differences were presented. Rao and colleagues[202] did not report this outcome measure.

Evening PEF (l/minute). In the study by Gustafsson and colleagues,[201] the mean baseline evening PEF and the change in evening PEF from baseline for the FP group were 326 and 21 l/minute, respectively. For the BDP group, the respective values were 340 and 16 l/minute. As with the morning PEF, no statistical information was provided for these differences. Rao and colleagues[202] did not report this outcome measure.

Symptoms

Rao and colleagues[202] presented daily summary scores for the entire 82-week study period but not for the initial 10-week period of interest. Gustafsson and colleagues[201] did not present daily summary scores as an outcome measure, but did report that there were no statistically significant differences between treatments in the percentage of SFDs or SFNs (no data or significance values were reported).

Use of rescue medication

Neither of the studies presented data in terms of mean number of inhalations per day.

Exacerbations

Only Gustafsson and colleagues[201] reported this outcome. They did not present the total number of exacerbations; however, three patients from each group withdrew because of exacerbations.

Adverse events

In the study by Gustafsson and colleagues,[201] 99 patients reported 155 AEs (three described as serious) in the FP group and 95 patients reported 153 AEs (two described as serious) in the BDP group. Rao and colleagues[202] did not present any data on AEs. They measured growth and bone density and reported a significantly higher growth rate in the FP-treated group (difference 0.81 cm/year, 95% CI 0.45 to 1.16 cm/year, no p-value given). However, the timing of these measurements is not relevant to the initial 10-week period of interest (bone density was measured over 20 months), or was unclear (the timing of the growth measurements was not stated).

Gustafsson and colleagues[201] found no significant difference between the two treatments in the effect on plasma cortisol. They reported that the ratio of FP to BDP [*sic*] was 1.00 (95% CI 0.91 to 1.09; p = 0.989), but the meaning of this statement is unclear. In the study by Rao and colleagues,[202] there was a significant drop in the plasma cortisol from baseline to 10 weeks in the BDP group (95% CI for the difference 44.64 to 254.50 nmol/l, p = 0.010), although the absolute values were still within the normal range. The corresponding 95% CI for the difference in the FP group was –149.91 to 260.25, p = 0.52. Statistics for the between group differences were not presented.

Summary

Two studies compared the efficacy and safety of FP and BDP in children. These studies differed considerably in their size and patient populations: one was with steroid-naïve patients, the other with patients on ICS that inadequately controlled their asthma. The studies tended to report different outcomes, which precluded meta-analysis. Only one of them presented statistical information about differences between the drugs. Overall, these studies do not appear to support the superiority of either FP or BDP. The AE profiles appear similar for the two drugs, although one study found a statistically significant drop in plasma cortisol levels in the BDP arm (but with absolute values within the normal range), but a similar change was not seen in the BDP arm.

Low-dose ICS: FP and BUD

Study characteristics

Two RCTs, by Agertoft and Pedersen in 1977[203] and Altintas and colleagues in 2005,[204] investigated the effectiveness of BUD versus FP in children (*Table 13*). Both trials used a parallel-group design (assumed from the text rather than explicitly stated in one trial[204]). The trials varied

TABLE 13 *Characteristics of studies (FP and BUD)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Agertoft and Pedersen, 1997[203]	RCT Parallel-group Double-blind Double-dummy	*Drugs:* 1. FP 100 or 200 μg b.d.[a] (daily total 200 or 400 μg) 2. BUD 100 or 200 μg b.d.[a] (daily total 200 μg or 400 μg) *Delivery device:* 1. Diskhaler DPI 2. Turbuhaler DPI No further details about devices were reported *Duration:* Varied among patients up to 15 weeks. Data for most outcomes reported for 5 weeks. *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 217 *Mean age (range) (years)* 1. 9.9 (5–15) 2. 10.1 (5–16) *Mean ± SD baseline FEV_1 % predicted* 1. 91.9 ± 14.6 2. 93.8 ± 13.3 *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* BUD 400 or 800 μg/day from pMDI with large volume spacer (Nebuhaler)	*Outcomes* Morning and evening PEF FEV_1 $FEF_{25–75\%}$ Dose reduction steps from baseline Minimal effective ICS dose (μg daily) Asthma symptom scores Rescue SABA use Urine cortisol excretion
Altintas *et al.*, 2005[204]	RCT Parallel-group	Drugs: 1. FP 250 μg/q.d. 2. BUD 400 μg/day 3. (Non-randomised) control group *Delivery device:* 1, 2. No details of device reported *Duration:* 12 months *Run-in period:* Not reported	*Number randomised* 30 *Mean age (range) (years)* 1. 9.6 ± 2.4[b] (6–12) 2. 10.6 ± 2.1[b] (7–13) *Mean baseline FEV_1 % predicted* 1. 60.6 ± 9.4[b] 2. 60.6 ± 9.4[b] *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* Children with moderate asthma	*Outcomes* Anthropometric measurements: Body mass index Growth rate Pulmonary functions: FVC PEF FEV_1 Bone metabolism: Serum calcium Serum phosphorus Serum ALP BMD Adrenal functions: Basal a.m. serum cortisol level Free cortisol in 24-hour urine collection Urine and calcium creatinine ratio ACTH stimulation test Symptom score

ACTH, adrenocorticotrophic hormone.
[a] After 5 weeks reduced to 100 μg b.d. – reduced by 50% every 5 weeks until deterioration in asthma control or acceptable asthma control achieved.
[b] Statistics (not stated) are assumed to be SD.

in sample sizes from 30 to 217 patients, and both were single-centre studies.

Altintas and colleagues[204] conducted a three-armed study, using a control group, but no details were supplied about the group. The study by Agertoft and Pedersen[203] contained two arms. The former study[204] compared total daily doses of 250 µg of FP and 400 µg of BUD, approximating a nominal dose ratio of 1:2. The latter study[203] used a starting total daily dose of 200 or 400 µg for both drug treatments, equivalent to a 1:1 ratio, with dose reductions of 50% at 5-week intervals.

Altintas and colleagues[204] used pMDI devices for both drugs (no further details on devices were reported). The Agertoft and Pedersen[203] study used a Turbuhaler for BUD and a Diskhaler for FP (both branded forms of DPI). The former study[204] had a treatment duration of 12 months, but the duration of the latter[203] varied among patients, with dose reductions by 50% at 5-week intervals until deterioration in asthma control or acceptable asthma control was seen. Data on most of the outcomes reported in that study were presented only for the first 5 weeks.

There was some variation in terms of the aims of the studies. Altintas and colleagues[204] did not specifically state whether the intention was to assess equivalence or superiority between treatments. Rather, the focus was on the AEs of ICS therapy on growth in children. Agertoft and Pedersen[203] aimed to determine the equipotency of the inhaled steroids, while also defining the minimal effective doses with these delivery systems.

The age range of children in the RCTs was 5–16 years and mean ages were in the range 9.6–10.6 years. Agertoft and Pedersen[203] reported children as having been treated previously with either 400 or 800 µg of BUD, but no previous treatment details were reported by Altintas and colleagues.[204] The mean baseline levels for FEV_1 ranged from 60%[204] to around 90%.[203] One trial included children with moderate asthma,[204] but the other did not report asthma severity.[203] Neither of the studies specifically stated their primary outcomes.

The study by Agertoft and Pedersen[203] reported an adequate method of randomisation, but no details of the randomisation procedure were reported by Altintas and colleagues.[204] Neither of the studies reported an ITT analysis.

Results

Lung function

Both of the trials reported measures of lung function. However, pooling results for meta-analysis was not possible due to the differences in study design and methodology.

Parallel 1:1 dose ratio studies. Agertoft and Pedersen[203] reported a mean change from baseline to the end of the first treatment period (5 weeks) in FEV_1 of 0.1 litres for the FP group and <0.1 litres for the BUD group. This difference between the groups was not statistically significant (95% CI –0.07 to 0.03, $p = 0.77$).

The change in PEF from baseline was presented as the difference between the mean PEF at baseline and the mean PEF during the last 2 weeks of the first 5 weeks of treatment (i.e. treatment weeks 4 and 5). The change from baseline in morning PEF was 7.6 l/minute for FP recipients and 1.9 l/minute for BUD recipients. This difference between groups was not statistically significant (95% CI –12.0 to 0.7, $p = 0.06$). The corresponding results for evening PEF were 5.1 l/minute for FP recipients and –0.7 l/minute for BUD recipients. This difference between groups was also not statistically significant (95% CI –12.1 to 0.6, $p = 0.06$).

Parallel 1:2 dose ratio studies. Altintas and colleagues[204] provided data showing improvements after 1 year in FEV_1 % predicted for both BUD and FP. However, due to an error in reporting (identical data were presented for both groups), these results cannot be used.

Symptoms

Parallel 1:1 dose ratio studies. Agertoft and Pedersen[203] measured day- and night-time symptom scores on a four-point scale (0 = none, 3 = severe, no reference supplied). The change from baseline in symptom scores was presented as the difference between the mean score at baseline and the mean score during the last 2 weeks of the first 5 weeks of treatment (i.e. treatment weeks 4 and 5). The change in daytime asthma symptom scores was –0.11 for the FP group and –0.05 for the BUD group. This difference between the groups was not statistically significant (95% CI –0.08 to 0.20, $p = 0.37$). The change in night-time asthma symptoms was –0.04 for patients on FP and –0.03 for patients on BUD. This difference between the groups was also not statistically significant (95% CI –0.07 to 0.09, $p = 0.75$).

Parallel 1:2 dose ratio studies. Altintas and colleagues[204] provided data showing

improvements in symptom scores after 1 year for both BUD and FP. However, due to an error in reporting (identical data were presented for both groups), these results cannot be used.

Use of rescue medication
Only Agertoft and Pedersen[203] reported the use of rescue medication as an outcome. They presented data on the daily use of SABAs, but did not state whether these were the number of inhaler sessions per day or the number of puffs per day. The change from baseline was reported as the difference between the mean SABA use at baseline and the mean use in weeks 4 and 5. SABA use remained relatively unchanged, with values of 0.02 for the FP group and 0.01 for the BUD group. This difference between the groups was not statistically significant (95% CI –0.20 to 0.18, $p = 0.87$).

Exacerbations
Neither of the trials reported exacerbations of asthma as an outcome measure.

Adverse events
Neither of the studies reported the number of AEs experienced by each treatment group, but other measures of safety or side-effects were reported.

Parallel 1:1 dose ratio studies. Agertoft and Pedersen[203] reported the change in 24-hour urine cortisol excretion from baseline to 5 weeks. This was 6.6 nmol for the FP group and 1.8 nmol for the BUD group. The difference between the groups is not statistically significant (95% CI –10.9 to 1.3, $p = 0.13$).

Parallel 1:2 dose ratio studies. Altintas and colleagues[204] reported growth rate (centimetres in 1 year). Growth increased at a similar rate and did not differ significantly between the groups (FP 8.2 cm/year, BUD 8.4 cm/year, $p > 0.05$). In the same study, morning serum cortisol levels decreased in both groups at 12 months, with no statistically significant difference between BUD and FP ($p > 0.05$). BMD was also comparable between groups, with no statistically significant difference ($p > 0.05$).

Summary
Two studies compared the efficacy and safety of FP and BDP among children. These RCTs had different designs and used different nominal dose ratios (1:1 and 1:2). The more detailed of these studies was only 5 weeks in duration, with some outcomes reported as mean values for weeks 4 and 5. No statistically significant differences were observed in measures of lung function when patients were treated with FP compared with treatment with BUD. Only one of the studies reported reliable symptom scores and a measure of safety (urine cortisol). Neither of these outcomes differed significantly between the treatment groups.

Summary of Q1: relative effectiveness of low-dose ICS
Summaries of the results are given in *Tables 14–16*.

Review question 2 – effectiveness of high-dose ICS

High-dose ICS: BDP and BUD

Study characteristics
Only one study, by Pedersen and Fuglsang[205] published in 1988, compared the effects of BUD and BDP in children (*Table 17*). It was a small, single-centre study conducted in Denmark, involving 31 children. The trial was an open-label, cross-over design with no wash-out period, containing two arms. It focused on systemic AEs rather than clinical effectiveness.

The total daily dose of ICS varied between 800 and 1200 μg/day, with a mean of 900 μg/day. The dose was equal to that normally used by the child, and was the same in both the BUD and BDP treatment periods. Thus the comparison of the two drugs was at a dose ratio of 1:1 throughout the study. The drugs were both delivered via an MDI, with or without a volume spacer (make or manufacturer of device not reported). The aim of the study was to determine if there were any differences between the two drugs in adverse systemic effects on adrenal function. For this purpose, cortisol excretion was chosen as the primary outcome (it was not explicitly stated whether the intention was to test equivalence or superiority). The treatment duration was two 6-week periods with no wash-out in between. However, the authors reported that no carry-over effects were found.

The trial included boys and girls aged between 5 and 15 years, with a mean age of 10 years. All the children had previously received high-dose ICS therapy with either BUD or BDP. The severity of asthma was not specifically stated and baseline FEV_1 % predicted was not reported. However, it may be assumed that the participants' asthma was severe in light of the high-dose ICS therapy.

The trial reported a randomisation procedure that assured true random assignment to treatment groups (a computer-generated algorithm), and which was also adequately concealed. However, these details were obtained by the authors of the

TABLE 14 *BDP versus BUD (1 RCT)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results										
			Lung function			Symptoms							
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS	HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
Stepwise increased doses: 200, 400, 800 μg/day	Bisgaard,[200] 12 weeks (3 × 4 weeks), parallel-group, double-blind, MDI; *n* = 41	BDP		C	C						C		2 withdrawals	NSD
		BUD											4 withdrawals	

C, stated to be comparable between trial arms but no tests of statistical significance reported; *n*, number of events; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.

TABLE 15 *FP versus BDP (2 RCTs)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms				HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS					
200 μg vs 400 μg	Gustafsson[a],[201] 6 weeks, parallel-group, double-blind, MDI; *n* = 398	FP					NSD	NSD					50% (3 serious)	NSD
		BDP	F[c]										47% (2 serious)	
	Rao[a],[202] 20 months, parallel-group, double-blind, MDI; *n* = 23	FP[b]	F											F
		BDP												

F, results appear to favour treatment group, but no tests of statistical significance reported; *n*, number of events; NSD, no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); blank cells signify no data reported on outcome.

[a] Gustafsson *et al*. reported within-group differences for measures of lung function, rather than between-group comparisons. Rao *et al*. presented FEV_1 data graphically with no between-group comparisons; only symptom scores for the entire period (not for the initial 10-week period of interest) were reported; AE outcomes were related to growth and bone turnover, therefore no usable data can be reported in the table.

[b] This study had a third arm where patients received placebo for 10 weeks and were then merged with the FP arm.

[c] Refers to FEV_1 (litres). Study also reports data for FEV_1 % predicted, where the values were identical in both groups.

TABLE 16 *BUD versus FP (2 RCTs)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms				HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS					
200 or 400 µg vs 200 or 400 µg[a]	Agertoft,[203] variable[a], parallel-group, double-blind, DPI; *n* = 217	FP BUD	NSD	NSD	NSD				NSD		NSD			NSD
250 µg vs 400 µg	Altintas[b],[204] 12 months, parallel-group, device not reported, *n* = 30	FP BUD												NSD

n, number of events; NSD, no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.

[a] Starting daily dose of 200 or 400 µg for 5 weeks with dose reductions by 50% at 5-week intervals.

[b] Altintas *et al*. did not analyse differences between groups; the focus was on the AEs of ICS therapy on growth, therefore no usable data can be reported in the table.

TABLE 17 *Study characteristics (BDP and BUD)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Pedersen and Fuglsang, 1988[205]	RCT Single-centre Cross-over (no wash-out) Open label	*Drug(s):* 1. BDP total 800–1200 μg/day 2. BUD total 800–1200 μg/day Taken b.d. as BDP 50, 100 or 250 μg per actuation, BUD 50 or 200 μg per actuation and remaining constant throughout the trial *Delivery device:* 1, 2. MDI ± spacer (Volumatic or Nebuhaler, no other details about devices reported) *Duration:* 2 × 6 weeks *Run-in period:* None	*Number randomised* 31 *Mean age (years)* 10.2 (range 5–15) *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* Not reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* BDP or BUD 800–1200 μg/day	*Outcomes* Adrenal function (as measured by 24-hour free cortisol excretion in urine) FEV_1 AEs

Cochrane review in which this trial was included, and not reported in the original paper. Although the trial was open label, the outcome assessors were blind to the experimental dose regimen. It is not known whether the study performed an ITT analysis.

Results

Lung function

Pedersen and colleagues[205] reported limited data on efficacy in terms of lung function parameters as this was not the main purpose of the study. The authors reported that FEV_1 at the end of each period was 2.35 litres (range 0.9–3.8 litres) for BDP compared with 2.26 litres (range 0.8–3.9 litres) for BUD. The difference was not statistically significant.

Symptoms, use of rescue medication, exacerbations

The trial did not report symptoms, use of rescue medication or exacerbations as outcome measures.

Adverse events

The authors stated that no side-effects were reported. However, one participant during the period on BUD was withdrawn from the study because of an acute exacerbation of asthma.

The excretion of urinary cortisol was statistically significantly higher during BUD treatment [76.3 (range 25–215) nmol/day] than during BDP treatment [53.7 (range 6–118) nmol/day) ($p < 0.01$)]. The difference was reported to be more pronounced in children treated with 1000–1200 µg/day ($n = 8$) than in those treated with 800 µg/day ($n = 22$). Cortisol excretion was below the normal range during the period on BDP for four children and during the period on BUD one child.

Summary

Only one small, single-centre, cross-over trial evaluated the effects of BUD compared with BDP in children receiving high-dose ICS therapy. The study focused on adverse systemic effects on adrenal function but also reported FEV_1 at the end of each period. The FEV_1 did not differ significantly between the BDP and BUD periods. However, treatment with BUD resulted in significantly higher 24-hour free cortisol excretion compared with BDP.

High-dose ICS: FP and BDP

Study characteristics

Three RCTs compared the effects of high doses of FP and BDP in children. These trials, published between 1997 and 2001, were by Yiallouros and colleagues,[206] Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] and de Benedictis and colleagues[208] (*Table 18*). One study used a parallel-group design,[208] whereas the other two studies used a cross-over design. The study sizes ranged from 34[206,207] to 343 patients.[208] Two of the trials were single-centre studies[206,207] and one trial was a multi-centre study.

All three RCTs contained two arms. There was variability in the doses used in the trials. Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] used a daily dose of 750 µg of FP and 1500 µg of BDP. In the study by Yiallouros and colleagues,[206] participants had been receiving between 400 and 900 µg/day of BUD/BDP (median 519 $\mu g/m^2$/day BUD, 588 $\mu g/m^2$/day BDP). They were randomised to receive either an equal dose of BDP or an equipotent (half the dose) of FP daily. The trial by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] used a daily dose of 400 µg for both FP and BDP. Thus, two studies used dose ratios of 1:2[206,207] (FP:BDP) and one study used a dose ratio of 1:1.[208] Two of the trials used MDI devices with spacers[206,207] (the only device details provided are by Yiallouros and colleagues, in that the devices were provided by Glaxo Group Research), and the third trial used a dry powder Diskhaler (no further details about the device were reported).[208] Two RCTs treated for 12 weeks[206,207] and the third RCT lasted for 52 weeks.[208] A range of efficacy outcomes were measured, and also safety, with two measuring adrenal function[206,207] (one of which was powered specifically to detect differences on this outcome[207]) and one measuring growth.[208]

All three RCTs contained two arms. There was variability in the doses used in the trials. Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] used a daily dose of 750 µg of FP and 1500 µg of BDP, Yiallouros and colleagues[206] used a daily dose of 200 µg of FP and 400 µg of BDP and de Benedictis and colleagues[208] used a daily dose of 400 µg for both FP and BDP. Hence, two studies used a dose ratio of 1:2[206,207] and one study 1:1.[208] Two of the trials used MDI devices with spacers[206,207] (the only device details provided are by Yiallouros and colleagues, in that the devices were provided by Glaxo Group Research) and the third trial used a dry powder Diskhaler (no details about the device were reported).[208]

Two RCTs had a treatment duration of 12 weeks[206,207] and the third RCT lasted 52 weeks.[208] Two of the studies measured adrenal function[206,207] and the third measured growth.[208]

The age range of children included in the RCTs varied from 4 to 15 years, with mean ages

TABLE 18 *Study characteristics (BDP and FP)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Fitzgerald *et al.* 1998[207]	RCT Cross-over (no wash-out) Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. FP 375 μg/b.d. (daily total 750 μg) 2. BDP 750 μg/b.d. (daily total 1500 μg) *Delivery device:* 1, 2. MDI + volume spacer (no further details about devices reported) *Duration:* 12 weeks *Run-in period:* 4 weeks	*Number randomised* 34 *Mean ± SD age (range) (years)* 1. 10.5 ± 2.5 (6–15) 2. 9.4 ± 2.9 (5–13) *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted (range)* 1. 86 (82–90) 2. 86 (82–90) *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* FP 750 μg/day or BDP 1500 μg/day	*Primary outcomes* PEF (morning and evening) Symptom scores (day and night) *Secondary outcomes* 24-hour urinary cortisol levels Growth AEs: No. of asthma exacerbations No. of asthma exacerbations requiring oral steroids Patient-assessed efficacy scale Physician-assessed efficacy scale Plasma ACTH 8 a.m. plasma cortisol Plasma cortisol 1 hour post-synthetic ACTH (Synacthen) (0.5 μg per 1.73 m^2 body surface area)
Yiallouros *et al.*, 1997[206]	RCT Cross-over (no wash-out) Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. BDP: dose equal to prestudy ICS 2. FP at half daily μg dose of prestudy ICS *Delivery device:* 1, 2. MDI + spacer (GlaxoSmithKline[a]) *Duration*: 12 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 34 (comprising 2 groups, A and B, before randomisation) *Median age (range) (years)* A. 7.3 (5–12.4) B. 8.8 (6–13.1) *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* Not reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and median dose)* A. BUD 519 μg/day B. BDP 588 μg/day (for ⩾3 months before randomisation)	*Outcomes* Urinary cortisol Urinary cortisol metabolites PEF (morning and evening) Symptom sores Rescue SABA use (day and night)

continued

TABLE 18 *Study characteristics (BDP and FP) (cont'd)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
de Benedictis *et al.*, 2001[208]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind	1. FP 200 μg/b.d. (daily total 400 μg) 2. BDP 200 μg /b.d. (daily total 400 μg) *Delivery device:* 1. DPI (Flixotide Diskhaler, GSK[a]) 2. DPI (Diskhaler, GSK[a]) *Duration:* 52 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 343 *Mean ± SD age (range) (years)* 1. 7.6 ± 1.7 (4–11) 2. 7.6 ± 2.0 (4–11) *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* No reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* FP 100–200 μg/day or BDP or BUD 200–500 μg/day	*Primary outcome* Growth velocity Secondary outcomes Symptom scores Rescue medication PEF (morning and evening) FEV_1

ACTH, adrenocorticotrophic hormone; GSK, GlaxoSmithKline.
[a] Not stated explicitly, but deduced from the text.

from 7[206,208] to 9 years.[207] One trial reported children as having been previously treated with 1000–2000 µg daily of BDP or BUD[207] and the second trial reported a daily median dose of 519 µg BUD or 588 µg BDP.[206] In the third trial, children had previously been treated with 100–200 µg daily of FP or 200–500 µg daily of BDP or BUD.[208] Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] reported mean baseline levels for FEV_1 at 80%. The other two studies reported measuring baseline levels for FEV_1, but provided no further details.[206,208] The study by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] described children as suffering with mild to moderate asthma, whereas the other two trials described children as suffering with persistent severe[207] or severe chronic asthma.[206]

The report by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] specified their primary outcome as growth velocity, whereas Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] specified their primary efficacy variables as PEF, and also day and night symptom scores. Yiallouros and colleagues[206] did not specify a primary outcome. Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] powered their study to detect a mean daily difference in PEF of 5% (15 l/minute in 10-year-old children) whereas de Benedictis and colleagues powered their study to detect a difference in growth rate of 1 cm/year. Yiallouros and colleagues[206] did not report statistical power or details of their randomisation procedure, and allocation concealment was also unclear in two of the studies.[206,207] Only two of the studies reported an ITT analysis[207,208] and only one study[208] reported the proportion of eligible patients that were not randomised (20/403, of which 10 were due to AEs, four for failure to return and six for withdrawal of consent). Both of the cross-over trials[206,207] had no wash-out period between treatments due to asthma severity; however, both of these trials reported that there were no carry-over effects.

Results

Lung function

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. The following data were obtained by the reviewers from the primary publication[208] and, in some cases, also from the Cochrane review.[187] The study by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] reported mean ± SD end-point data for FEV_1 in the FP group to be 1.75 ± 0.29 litres and in the BDP group to be 1.63 ± 0.31 litres. This was shown to be statistically significantly different in favour of FP, $p < 0.001$. Mean ± SD morning PEF in this trial was 251.30 ± 29.81 l/minute at end-point in the FP group compared with 242.80 ± 31.38 l/minute in the BDP group. The difference between groups (8.5 l/minute) was statistically significant (95% CI 2.8 to 14.2, $p = 0.004$). Mean ± SD evening PEF was 255.10 ± 28.52 l/minute at end-point in the FP group compared with 246.50 ± 30.08) l/minute in the BDP group, with the difference between groups (8.6 l/minute) also statistically significant (95% CI 3.0 to 14.1, $p = 0.003$).

Cross-over design, 1:2 dose ratio. Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] demonstrated no statistically significant differences between FP and BDP in mean morning PEF [FP 311 l/minute, BDP 308 l/minute, treatment difference 2.6 l/minute (95% CI –1.8 to 7.0 l/minute)]. Results in the trial were adjusted to take account of a significant period effect and patient differences in the sequence groups. To investigate a possible carry-over effect, the analysis was repeated for the last month of treatment (month 3). The results were similar with no differences demonstrated between the two treatment groups. Yiallouros and colleagues[206] also demonstrated no statistically significant differences between FP and BDP in mean morning PEF (both groups 268 l/minute). The trial also reports that no statistically significant carry-over effect was detected ($p = 0.144$).

Similarly, no statistically significant differences between the two groups were shown in mean evening PEF [FP 316 l/minute, BDP 312 l/minute, treatment difference 4.2 l/minute (95% CI –1.2 to 9.5 l/minute)] in Fitzgerald and colleagues' trial.[207] Results were adjusted to take account of a significant period effect and patient differences in sequence groups. Yiallouros and colleagues[206] also reported that there was no statistically significant difference between the two drugs for the mean evening PEF [no results were presented but they commented that there was a trend towards a carry-over effect ($p = 0.096$)].

Symptoms/health related quality of life

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. The study by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] reported no significant differences between treatment groups with respect to diary-card symptoms, but no data were presented to support this.

Cross-over design, 1:2 dose ratio. Symptom scores were reported on a four-point scale (0 = no symptoms, 3 = unable to carry out activities due to shortness of breath) in the trial by Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] (no reference supplied). Day- and night-time symptom scores (adjusted to take account of a significant period effect and patient differences in sequence groups) were reported

(without *p*-values) as being not statistically significantly different at end-point between the FP-treated patients and the BDP-treated patients. The daytime scores were 0.3 for FP and 0.4 for BDP, with a treatment difference of –0.1 (95% CI –0.8 to 0.02). Night-time symptom scores were 0.3 for both drugs, with a treatment difference of –0.05 (95% CI –0.14 to 0.03).

Use of rescue medication

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. The study by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] reported no significant differences between treatment groups with respect to the need for rescue medication, but no data were presented to support this.

Cross-over design, 1:2 dose ratio. Yiallouros and colleagues[206] reported that there were no statistically significant differences between FP and BDP treatments with respect to the need for rescue medication, but no data were presented to support this.

Exacerbations

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. The total number of exacerbations in the FP group was 47 compared with 52 in the BDP group in de Benedictis and colleagues' trial.[208] The percentage of patients experiencing at least one exacerbation was 16% in the FP group compared with 19% in the BDP group. No statistical significance testing was reported for these outcomes.

Cross-over design, 1:2 dose ratio. The total number of exacerbations in the trial by Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] was 33 during treatment with FP and 35 during treatment with BDP. This is reported to be not statistically significant although no p-value is reported. Overall the study reports that 16 of these exacerbations were in the group who received FP first whereas 52 exacerbations were in the group who received BDP first. This difference was shown to be statistically significant ($p < 0.001$) and the authors suggest that a greater proportion of less stable cases were placed in this latter treatment sequence.

Adverse events

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. AEs were experienced at similar rates in the FP and BDP arms of the trial by de Benedictis and colleagues[208] (around 80% in both groups). Mean ± SEM growth rates for the ITT populations were 4.76 ± 0.28 cm/year in the FP-treated group and 4.06 ± 0.29 cm/year in the BDP-treated group. This difference (0.7 cm/year) was statistically significant (95% CI 0.13 to 1.26 cm/year, $p < 0.02$).

In the same study,[208] there were no statistically significant differences in changes from baseline morning serum cortisol levels between treatment groups (FP 8.1 µg/dl; BDP 7.1 µg/dl, $p = 0.12$). There were no statistically significant differences in changes from baseline overnight urinary cortisol levels (FP 14.0 µg/dl; BDP 12.6 µg/dl, $p = 0.32$).

Cross-over design, 1:2 dose ratio. Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] reported that there were no differences in the number of AEs between the FP and BDP treatment phases in their study, but no data were presented. Similarly, Yiallouros and colleagues[206] reported that the incidence of AEs was similar in the two groups, but no data were presented.

One patient discontinued during treatment with FP and three during treatment with BDP in Yiallouros and colleagues' trial.[206]

Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] commented that there was no evidence of growth suppression (based on height SD scores) and no evidence of a significant effect of drug treatment on growth, which remained normal (no *p*-values were provided).

There were no statistically significant differences in adjusted mean urinary free cortisol levels between the FP and BDP treatment groups in the Fitzgerald and colleagues[207] trial (25.3 nmol per 24 hours FP versus 25.2 nmol per 24 hours, treatment difference –0.1 (95% CI –6.0 to 6.3). Similarly, in the Yiallouros and colleagues[206] trial, there were no statistically significant differences in adjusted total cortisol between the two study medications (FP 1315 µg/dl, BDP 1254 µg/dl, $p = 0.55$).

Summary

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio

Patients treated with FP improved more than patients treated with BDP on measures of lung function. However, differences between the groups on measures of symptoms, use of rescue medication and exacerbations were not statistically significant, although reported data were limited on these outcomes. Similar rates of AEs were noted between the two treatments, except that the BDP-treated group had a significantly lower growth rate.

Cross-over design, 1:2 dose ratio

On measures of lung function, no significant differences were observed between groups treated with FP and groups treated with BDP. No differences between the two treatments were observed on symptoms, use of rescue medications or exacerbation rates where data was reported. The AE profiles of the two drugs were similar.

High-dose ICS: FP and BUD

Study characteristics

Three parallel group RCTs[210–213] evaluated the effectiveness of BUD compared with FP, published between 1996 and 2002 (*Table 19*). One study[212] reported additional data in a secondary publication.[213]

Two studies were multi-centre studies where study sample sizes ranged between 229 and 333 participants;[210,211] the third study was a single-centre pilot study where the sample size was 60.[212,213] Only one of the trials reported undertaking a power calculation, where adequate power in the sample was met.[211]

All three included trials had two-arm comparisons of BUD versus FP. One trial compared FP 400 µg with BUD 400 µg, a nominal dose ratio of 1:1.[210] Two trials compared FP with BUD at a nominal dose ratio of 1:2.[211–213] One compared 400 µg/day of FP with 800 µg/day of BUD[211] and the second compared FP 500 µg/day with BUD 800 µg/day.[212,213] The latter study reduced doses after 2 months to 200 and 400 µg/day, respectively. This study also had a third, non-randomised comparison group, who were prescribed cromones (not discussed here). The devices used in all three studies were DPIs for BUD respectively [Diskhalers: Flixotide, GlaxoSmithKline (GSK); Turbuhalers: Pulmicort, AZ). The treatment duration in the 1:1 dose ratio study was 8 weeks.[210] The treatment duration for the two 1:2 dose ratio studies were similar at 16 weeks and 20 weeks for the studies by Kannisto and colleagues[212,213] and Ferguson and colleagues,[211] respectively.

All three included trials aimed to compare the clinical efficacy of the two drugs, administered in a DPI. The outcomes used to measure clinical efficacy differed between the groups. The one trial using equal doses of the two comparator drugs[210] aimed to compare the efficacy and effects on serum cortisol and serum and urinary indices of bone metabolism. The trial by Ferguson and colleagues[211] was reported to be an equivalence trial, assessing morning PEF as their primary outcome. The third trial,[212,213] reported as a pilot study, aimed to measure clinical efficacy using FEV_1 as the primary outcome.

The ages of participants in the trials are likely to be similar. Two trials report age ranges that lie between 4 and 15 years[210–213] and one trial reports mean ages between 7.9 and 8.2 years.[211] The severity of asthma varied across the three studies. In the 1:1 dose ratio study, participants were described as mild to moderate in severity.[210] In the two 1:2 dose ratio studies, participants were described as moderate to severe[211] and newly diagnosed.[212,213] In the trials by Hoekx and colleagues[210] and Ferguson and colleagues,[211] all patients were already prescribed ICS. Baseline FEV_1 % predicted was reported in only one of the included trials and was similar across the comparison arms at 92%.[212,213]

The method of randomisation and allocation concealment was assessed to be adequate in the trial by Hoekx and colleagues.[210] In the trials by Ferguson and colleagues[211] and Kannisto and colleagues,[212,213] no method of randomisation was reported and allocation concealment was also unclear. These two factors reduce the risk of selection bias and therefore care is required when interpreting the last two trials. Only the trial by Ferguson and colleagues[211] reported that data were analysed using an ITT principle, although, as it appears that some participants were excluded from the data analysis, reporting is not considered accurate.

Results

Lung function

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. Hoekx and colleagues[210] presented data on morning and evening PEF as the mean of available data during a period of 1–8 weeks of treatment. They also presented this as an adjusted mean to account for differences in baseline gender, age and country. During the treatment period (weeks 1–8) the adjusted mean morning PEF was 274 l/minute in the FP group compared with 267 l/minute in the BUD group, which was statistically significant ($p = 0.019$). The adjusted mean evening PEF did not differ significantly between the groups (FP 279 l/minute, BUD 273 l/minute, $p = 0.054$). No measures of variance were reported.

Parallel design, 1:2 dose ratio. After 20 weeks of treatment, the adjusted mean morning PEF for the FP group in the trial by Ferguson and colleagues[211] was 271 (± SD 82) l/minute compared with 259 (± SD 75) l/minute in the BUD arm. The treatment regimens were shown not to be equivalent, as determined by an *a priori* calculation of the 90% CI. The difference was shown to be statistically significantly different, $p = 0.002$ in favour of FP. Evening PEF was not statistically significantly different between the two groups [FP 271 (± SD 104) l/minute, BUD 259 (± SD 103) l/minute, mean difference 12 (95% CI –11.12 to 35.12)].

TABLE 19 *Characteristics of studies (BUD and FP)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Hoekx *et al.*, 1996[210]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. FP 100 μg 2 puffs b.d. (daily total 400 μg) + placebo 2. BUD 200 μg 1 puff b.d. (daily total 400 μg) + placebo *Delivery device:* 1. DPI Diskhaler (Flixotide, GSK) 2. DPI Turbuhaler (Pulmicort, AZ) *Duration:* 8 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 229 *Age range (years)* 4–13 years *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* Not reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* Mild-to-moderate asthma (all taking ICS but no details of drug or dose)	*Outcomes* FEV_1 Clinic PEF PEF (morning and evening) Daytime asthma symptom score % SFDs % SFNs Days missed from school (patients) Days missed from work (parents) Parent completed, patient-centred assessment of physical and social activity Morning serum cortisol Biochemical markers of bone turnover
Ferguson *et al.*, 1999[211]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind	*Drug(s):* 1. FP 400 μg daily 2. BUD 800 μg daily *Delivery device:* 1. DPI Diskhaler (Flixotide, GSK) 2. DPI Turbuhaler (Pulmicort, AZ) *Duration:* 20 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 333 *Mean age (years)* 1. 8.2 ± 2 2. 7.9 ± 2 *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* Not reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* All taking ICS but no details of drug or dose	*Outcomes* Morning PEF Change in day- and night-time symptom score Daytime SABA use Change in height compared Change in morning plasma cortisol Asthma exacerbations Oro-pharyngeal side-effects Height assessment
Kannisto *et al.*, 2002[212,213]	RCT Parallel-group Open-label	*Drugs:* 1. FP 250 μg b.d. (daily total 500 μg) – 200 μg/day after 2 months 2. BUD 400 μg b.d. (daily total 800 μg) – 400 μg/day after 2 months 3. Cromolyn 200 μg t.d.s. (daily total 600 μg) or Nedocromil 40 μg t.d.s. (daily total 120 μg) Only groups 1 and 2 relevant here *Delivery device:* 1. DPI Diskus (Flixotide, GSK) 2. DPI Turbuhaler (Pulmicort, AZ) *Duration:* 16 weeks *Run-in period:* Not reported	*Number randomised* 60 for groups 1 and 2 (75 in total) *Age range (years)* 5.5–14.7 years *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted (± SD)* 1. 92 ± 11 2. 92 ± 15 *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* None	*Outcomes* FEV_1 % change from baseline Number with fall in FEV_1 Rescue medication usage: doses/week Changes in height

Ferguson and colleagues[211] reported a comparable improvement from baseline to end of treatment in FEV_1 between the groups [FP 1.74 (± SD 0.51), BUD 1.66 (± SD 0.44), $p = 0.183$]. Kannisto and colleagues[212,213] reported that change in FEV_1 % predicted was 5.5% (± SD 11.83) for the FP group and 6.7% (± SD 13.25) for the BUD group. These changes from baseline were reported to be not statistically significantly different but no *p*-value was reported.

Symptoms/health-related quality of life

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. Although Hoekx and colleagues[210] reported some data on symptoms, inadequate information was provided for the purposes of the present review.

Parallel design, 1:2 dose ratio. Ferguson and colleagues[211] reported that there were no differences between the FP and BUD groups on change in daytime symptom scores, but no data were presented to support this.

Use of rescue medication

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. No data on use of rescue medication in terms of puffs per day were reported in the included trial[210] in this category.

Parallel design, 1:2 dose ratio. Ferguson and colleagues[211] reported that there were no differences between the FP and BUD groups on the need for rescue medication, but no data were presented to support this. Kannisto and colleagues[212,213] showed at end-point that rescue medication usage in terms of puffs per day was lower in the FP group [1.70 (± SD 3.45)] compared with the BUD group [3.75 (± SD 7.50)], but this was not statistically significantly different [mean difference –2.05 (95% CI –5.00 to 0.90)].

Exacerbations

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. No data on exacerbation rates were reported in the included trial in this category.

Parallel design, 1:2 dose ratio. No data on exacerbation rates were reported in either included trial in this category.

Adverse events

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio. The proportion of patients with an AE ⩾5% were similar in the FP and BUD groups in the trial by Hoekx and colleagues[210] (63% versus 69%, respectively). Two patients from the FP group and three from the BUD group in this trial discontinued due to AEs. One patient from each treatment group had a serious AE. The mean value of serum cortisol concentration rose from 248 nmol/l (baseline) to 291 nmol/l (after 8 weeks) for those on FP treatment, and from 214 nmol/l (baseline) to 246 nmol/l (after 8 weeks) for those on BUD treatment. An FP/BUD ratio of change in mean cortisol level was shown to be statistically significantly different between the two groups at 4 weeks ($p = 0.022$) but not statistically significantly different between the two groups at 8 weeks ($p = 0.074$).

Parallel design, 1:2 dose ratio. Ferguson and colleagues[211] reported that there were no significant differences in the number of children who experienced an AE between the two treatment groups [FP 144/166, BUD 145/167 patients, OR 0.99 (95% CI 0.53 to 1.87)]. Serious AEs were experienced by 4/166 children in the FP group and 10/167 children in the BUD group. Four patients in the FP treatment group and one in the BUD treatment group discontinued due to AEs. The study by Kannisto and colleagues[212] did not report proportions of patients experiencing AEs other than growth and serum cortisol changes.

Kannisto and colleagues[212,213] reported that the decrease in height SD scores differed significantly between the treatment groups ($p < 0.05$). In the FP group, eight patients (27%) experienced a decrease in the height SD score (absolute risk increase 7%, 95% CI 13 to 67%). In the BUD group, the decrease affected 18 patients (60%) (absolute risk increase 40%, 95% CI –19 to 33%).

In the study by Ferguson and colleagues,[211] the adjusted mean growth from end of run-in to 20 weeks was 3.31 cm in FP-treated subjects and 1.99 cm in BUD-treated subjects. This difference (1.32 cm) was statistically significant (90% CI 0.48 to 2.17, $p = 0.002$).

Kannisto and colleagues[212,213] reported that the cortisol response decreased in five patients (17%) in the FP group (absolute risk increase 17%, 95% CI 4 to 30%) and in nine patients (30%) in the BUD group (absolute risk increase 30%, 95% CI 14 to 47%). This difference between the drugs is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$).

In the study by Ferguson and colleagues,[211] adjusted geometric mean serum cortisol concentrations at the end of treatment were 199 mmol/l in the FP-treated group and 183 mmol/l in the BUD-treated group. The ratio of these means (1.09) does not differ significantly from 1.0 (95% CI 0.98 to 1.21, $p = 0.172$).

Summary

Parallel design, 1:1 dose ratio

Limited available data suggest that on measures of lung function there were greater improvements in the FP-treated groups than the BUD-treated groups, although this was not always statistically significant. Rates of AEs and discontinuations were similar between the two treatment groups.

Parallel design, 1:2 dose ratio

On measures of lung function, one trial demonstrated superiority of FP over BUD on morning PEF, but similarity between the two groups on evening PEF. The other trial showed comparable improvement between groups on FEV_1. No differences between FP and BUD were seen on measures of symptoms or use of rescue medication. Growth was significantly lower in BUD-treated patients in both trials and more AEs were experienced by BUD-treated children in one of the trials. The AE profiles, including changes in cortisol concentrations, were otherwise similar between the two drugs. Data on most outcomes were limited.

Summary of Q2: relative effectiveness of high-dose ICS

Summaries of the results are given in *Tables 20–22*.

Review question 3a – ICS/LABA or higher dose ICS

No RCTs of this comparison with an exclusively child patient population were identified. However, one RCT, included in our accompanying report on inhaled corticosteroids,[199] included around 12% of patients under the age of 12 years.[198] Results for growth and plasma cortisol only are reported separately for children and are presented here. A further brief summary of the results from the overall trial population for both adults and children is also presented.

The study by O'Byrne and colleagues[198] (*Table 23*) was published in 2005 and evaluated the combination of BUD/FF in a single inhaler with higher doses of BUD alone. It was a multi-centre study conducted in 246 centres across 22 countries. Of the 2760 participants, 341 (12%) were children aged 4–11 years. The trial was a double-blind parallel-group design, containing three arms. The first arm was 80 µg BUD/4.5 µg FF twice daily with the combination inhaler as reliever, the second arm was 80 µg BUD/4.5 µg FF twice daily with terbutaline as reliever and the final arm was 320 µg BUD twice daily with terbutaline as reliever. Children were given half the maintenance dose once daily at night. All study medication was delivered by Turbohaler (BUD, Pulmicort Turbuhaler, AZ).

The rationale of the trial was to test the superiority of combined treatment and the treatment duration was 12 months. The time to first severe asthma exacerbation was the primary outcome measure. The age range of all patients was from 4 to 79 years, with a mean of around 36 years. The mean baseline FEV_1 % predicted was 73%. Prior to entry, children had to be treated with 200–500 µg/day of inhaled corticosteroid. The trial was of reasonable methodological quality. A computer-generated random number list was used (they were randomised in balanced blocks and there were separate lists for children and adults), and the treatment delivery devices were indistinguishable – no other details were available. The study reported using ITT analysis.

The majority of results (pertaining to adults) are presented in our accompanying assessment report on the efficacy and safety of ICS in adults.[199] However, for clarity a summary of the overall results is presented here for the total trial population and the safety results which were reported separately for children are reported in full.

Summary of trial results for overall population

Treatment with BUD/FF combination used as maintenance and reliever therapy significantly prolonged the time to first severe and mild exacerbation compared with treatment with either BUD/FF plus terbutaline or BUD plus terbutaline. Furthermore, treatment with combination therapy as both maintenance and reliever was associated with significantly reduced reliever medication use, improvements in both morning and evening PEF and FEV_1 and the number of night-time awakenings compared with the two other treatment groups.

Adverse events

Children in both BUD/FF groups grew significantly more than those in the BUD group. There was an adjusted mean difference in growth of 1.0 cm between children treated with BUD/FF as maintenance and reliever compared with BUD (95% CI 0.3 to 1.7, $p = 0.0054$), and a difference of 0.9 cm between BUD/FF with terbutaline reliever compared with BUD (95% CI 0.2 to 1.6, $p = 0.0099$).

Data were also presented for mean change in morning plasma cortisol. The between-group differences were 11% (95% CI –7 to 33%) for BUD/FF with terbutaline reliever versus BUD, 1%

TABLE 20 *BDP versus BUD (1 RCT)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms							AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS	HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations		
800–1200 μg[a]	Pederson,[205] 12 weeks, cross-over, open-label, MDI; $n = 31$	BDP	NSD											+
		BUD												

NSD, no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); +, statistically significant difference between trial arms; blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.

[a] Same in each group and remaining constant throughout the study period.

TABLE 21 *FP versus BDP (3 RCTs)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms								
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS	HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
1500 vs 750 µg	Fitzgerald,[207] 12 weeks, cross-over, double-blind, MDI, *n* = 34	BDP FP		NSD	NSD				NSD[a]			NSD	81% 80%	NSD
400 vs 200 µg	Yiallouros,[206] 12 weeks, cross-over, double-blind, MDI, *n* = 34	BDP FP		NSD	NSD						NSD		C	NSD
400 vs 400 µg	de Benedictis,[208] 52 weeks, parallel, double-blind, DPI, *n* = 343	BDP FP	+	+	+				NSD[b]		NSD	C	C	

C, stated to be comparable between trial arms but statistical tests not reported; NSD, no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); +, indicates results significantly favour this trial arm; blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.

[a] Day-time symptom scores.

[b] Diary card symptoms.

TABLE 22 *FP versus BUD (3 RCTs)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms								
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS	HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
400 vs 400 µg	Hoekx,[210] 8 weeks, parallel, double-blind, DPI, *n* = 229	BUD FP		+ 	F[c] 								69% 63%	NSD
800 vs 400 µg	Ferguson,[211] 20 weeks, parallel, double-blind, DPI, *n* = 333	BUD FP	NSD	 +	NSD				C[d]		C		NSD	NSD
800 vs 500 µg[a]	Kannisto,[212,213] 16 weeks, parallel, open-label, DPI, *n* = 60 (75 total)	BUD FP[b]	NSD								NSD		NSD	NSD

C, stated to be comparable between trial arms but statistical tests not reported; *n*, number of events; NSD, no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); +, indicates results significantly favour this trial arm; blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.

[a] Doses reduced after 2 months to 400 µg BUD vs 200 µg FP.

[b] This study had a third non-randomised arm receiving cromones.

[c] Borderline statistical significance ($p = 0.054$).

[d] Day-time symptom scores.

TABLE 23 *Study characteristics (BUD versus BUD + FF)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
O'Byrne *et al.*, 2005[198]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind	1. BUD + FF 80 μg + 4.5 μg b.d. plus 80 μg + 4.5 μg as needed (daily total 160 μg + 9 μg) + combination inhaler as reliever 2. BUD + FF 80 μg + 4.5 μg b.d. (daily total 160 μg + 9 μg) + terbutaline as reliever as needed 3. BUD 320 μg b.d. (daily total 640 μg) + terbutaline as reliever as needed Children were given half the maintenance dose once daily *Delivery device:* 1, 2, 3. DPI (Pulmicort Turbuhaler, AZ) *Duration:* 12 months *Run-in period:* 14–18 days	*Number randomised* 2760 (341 children) *Mean age (range) (years)* 1. 35 (4–77) 2. 36 (4–79) 3. 36 (4–79) *Baseline mean FEV_1 % predicted (range)* 1. 73 (43–108) 2. 73 (46–108) 3. 73 (49–100) *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* Adults 400–1000 μg q.d., children 200–500 μg q.d.	*Primary outcome* The time to first severe asthma exacerbation. Secondary outcomes FEV_1 PEF (morning and evening) Asthma symptom scores (day/night) Awakenings Reliever medication use SFDs Rescue medication-free days Asthma control days Study drug use AEs Height (children) Morning plasma cortisol Mild exacerbations
NB. This trial also examines the effects of the combination inhaler as a reliever. 12% are children (4–11 years).				

(95% CI –15 to 21%) for BUD/FF as maintenance and reliever versus BUD, and –9% (95% CI –23 to 9%) for the two BUD/FF groups. The differences were not statistically significant.

Summary of Q3a: ICS/LABA or higher dose ICS

A summary of the results is presented in *Table 24*.

Review question 3b – ICS/LABA or similar dose ICS

FP/SAL versus FP

Study characteristics

Only one RCT, published in 2005, evaluated the combination of SAL and FP compared with FP alone[214] (*Table 25*). It was a multi-centre study conducted in 79 sites across the USA and Canada, and involving 203 children. The trial was a double-blind, parallel-group design, containing two arms.

The total daily dose of FP was 200 µg and was the same in both arms. The total daily dose of SAL was 100 µg. The drugs were both delivered via a Diskus inhaler device (FP, Flovent, GSK), with the FP/SAL drugs delivered in combination via a single inhaler (Advair, GSK).

The rationale of the study appeared to be whether the addition of a LABA to the ICS (as opposed to increasing the dose of ICS) is as safe as treatment with ICS alone. It is not explicitly stated whether the intention was to test equivalence or superiority of safety measures. The treatment period of the trial was 12 weeks.

The study included boys and premenarcheal girls aged between 4 and 11 years, with a mean age of 8 years. All patients had previously received a range of ICS therapy at a consistent dose, with FP being the most commonly used ICS in each group (70–74% of patients used FP). The severity of asthma was not specifically stated, but the mean baseline FEV_1 % predicted was approximately 80%.

Although the primary objective of the trial was to compare the safety profile of the two treatments, some measures of efficacy were obtained. However, these were reported in separate abstract publications.[215,216]

On the whole, the study was of adequate quality with regard to the reporting of methodological details. The study used an ITT analysis which included all subjects who received at least one dose of the study drug. However, details of the randomisation procedure and concealment of allocation were lacking. The eligibility criteria were adequately specified, and the supplemental paper[216] described withdrawals and drop-outs, with reasons and numbers reported for each treatment group.

Results

Lung function

The main publication for this trial[214] did not report any values for lung function as this was a safety study and was not designed to evaluate efficacy differences between treatment groups. However, the authors did report that the FP/SAL group showed greater improvements in FEV_1 and in morning and evening PEF compared with FP alone.

In one of the abstract publications for the study,[215] FEV_1 (litres) at end-point was reported for a subgroup of children aged 6–11 years, and was 1.88 versus 1.77 litres for FP/SAL versus FP, respectively. No *p*-values were reported. A second abstract linked to this study[216] reported a mean change [± standard error (SE)] from baseline in morning PEF (l/minute) of 21.5 ± 2.79 versus 16.9 ± 2.85 and evening PEF of 21.5 ± 2.43 versus 15.1 ± 2.83 for FP/SAL and FP, respectively. Again, statistical significance was not reported. Caution is advised as these data are taken from conference abstracts and have not been subjected to academic journal peer review.

Symptoms

Daytime asthma symptom scores were based on a Likert scale, which is a five-point rating scale (0 = none, 5 = severe, no reference supplied), and were recorded by the parent or guardian on a daily diary card. The asthma symptom scores improved to a similar degree in both treatment groups [–0.6 ± 0.10 versus –0.5 ± 0.12 (mean ± SE) for FP/SAL versus FP, respectively].

Use of rescue medication

The mean reduction from baseline in the use of albuterol (number of puffs per day) was similar in both treatment groups [–0.5 ± 0.22 versus –0.4 ± 0.19 (mean ± SE) for FP/SAL versus FP, respectively].

Exacerbations

The trial reported that children treated with FP/SAL had a lower incidence of asthma exacerbations than children treated with FP alone, occurring in three (3%) and eight (8%) patients, respectively. Withdrawal from the study due to asthma exacerbations occurred in two (2%) children treated with FP/SAL and five (5%) children treated with FP alone.

TABLE 24 *BUD versus BUD/FF (1 RCT)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms				HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS					
	O'Byrne *et al.*,[198] parallel, 12 months, DPI, *n* = 2760 (341 children)	1. BUD 2. BUD/FF[a] 3. BUD/FF[b]												NSD 2 vs 1 3 vs 1

NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.
[a] BUD/FF with terbutaline as a reliever when needed.
[b] BUD/FF used for both maintenance and relief.

TABLE 25 *Study characteristics (FP versus FP + SAL)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Malone *et al.* 2005[214]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind Active-controlled	*Drugs:* 1. FP/SAL 100/50 μg b.d. (total dose 200/100 μg) 2. FP 100 μg b.d. (total dose 200 μg) *Delivery device:* 1. Diskus (Advair, GSK) 2. Diskus (Flovent, GSK) *Duration:* 12 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 203 *Mean age (years)* 1. 8.0 2. 8.1 *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* 1. 80.9 2. 80.0 *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* BDP 252–336 μg/day, triamcinolone acetonide 600–1,000 μg/day, flunisolide 1,000 μg/day, FP 88–250 μg/day, or BUD 200–400 μg/day consistent dose for 1 month prior to study	*Primary outcome* Safety measures (AEs) *Secondary outcomes* FEV_1 (for aged 6–11 years) PEF (morning and evening) 2-hour serial post-dose FEV_1 (for those aged 6–11 years) or 2-hour serial post-dose PEF (for those aged 4–5 year) after the first dose of study medication on treatment day 1 Daytime asthma scores 24-hour rescue medication use Asthma exacerbations or worsening asthma

Adverse events
The overall incidence of AEs was similar in the two treatment groups, with 59% in the FP/SAL group compared with 57% of FP treated patients experiencing any AE (occurring at a rate of ⩾3% during treatment). Slightly more patients in the FP/SAL group experienced at least one AE that was potentially related to the study drug (13 versus 9% for FP/SAL and FP, respectively). Similarly, addition of a LABA resulted in three (3%) patients having AEs leading to premature study withdrawal compared with none with FP alone. There were no serious drug-related AEs in either group.

Summary
Only one multi-centre, parallel group trial evaluated FP compared with SAL and FP delivered in combination via a single inhaler. Children in the SAL/FP group showed apparent greater improvements in lung function compared with FP alone, although no statistical data were reported. Furthermore, addition of a LABA to FP appeared to be as safe as treatment with FP alone.

ICS versus ICS + LABA (BUD vs BUD/FF)
Study characteristics
The study by Tal and colleagues[217] was the only RCT which evaluated the effectiveness of the combination of FF and BUD compared with BUD alone in children (*Table 26*). It was an international, multi-centre study conducted in 48 centres in seven countries (Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Israel, South Africa, Spain and the UK), and involving 286 children. The trial was a double-blind, parallel-group design, containing two arms.

Patients in the BUD/FF group received 80/4.5 µg, compared with BUD 100 µg, both taken as two puffs twice daily. The doses of BUD in each treatment group were equivalent (differences are explained by labelling changes for new inhaled drugs which require the delivered dose rather than the metered dose to be reported). The total daily dose of BUD was 400 µg in each group, and both groups used the Turbuhaler device (Symbicort and Pulmicort, both AZ) for drug administration. The hypothesis of the study was that the combination of BUD/FF would lead to improved lung function compared with treatment with BUD alone. The treatment period of the trial was 12 weeks.

The trial included asymptomatic children aged 4–17 years, with a mean age of 11 years. All the children had previously received a range of ICS therapy at a constant dose. The severity of asthma was described by the authors as moderate, and the mean baseline FEV_1 % predicted was approximately 75%.

The primary outcome was morning and evening PEF, and this reflected the rationale of the study, which was that addition of a LABA to ICS would lead to improved lung function compared with ICS therapy alone.

Methodological quality was generally adequate. The trial reported a randomisation procedure that assured true random assignment to treatment groups (a computer-generated block-randomisation list), and which was also adequately concealed. A double-dummy technique was used for drug administration, and also a double-blind procedure, and the study used an ITT analysis with all available data.

Results
Lung function
Relative to baseline, children treated with BUD/FF exhibited significantly greater increases in FEV_1 % predicted compared with BUD alone (86.77 versus 83.02%, $p < 0.05$). A beneficial effect of adding a LABA was further seen in terms of improvement in morning PEF (% predicted), with the mean increase from baseline being significantly greater in the BUD/FF group compared with BUD alone (7.22 versus 3.45%, $p < 0.001$). Evening PEF also increased significantly with BUD/FF (6.13 versus 2.73%, $p < 0.001$).

Symptoms
The severity of daytime and nocturnal asthma symptoms were recorded using a four-point rating scale (0 = none, 3 = severe, no reference supplied). There were no significant differences in asthma symptoms between the two groups at the end of treatment. The percentage of SFDs (defined as a night and day without symptoms and no asthma-related nocturnal awakenings) was determined as an overall measure of symptom control. The percentage of SFDs was slightly greater in the BUD/FF group (77.5%) compared with the BUD group (75.1%), but this difference was not significant.

Use of rescue medication
Similar improvements in the use of inhaled terbutaline or salbutamol (number of puffs per day) were observed in both treatment groups.

TABLE 26 *Study characteristics (BUD versus BUD/FF)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Tal *et al*., 2002[217]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind Double-dummy	*Drugs:* 1. BUD/FF 80/4.5 μg 2 puffs b.d. actuation (daily total 400/18 μg) 2. BUD 100 μg 2 puffs b.d (daily total 400 μg) *Delivery device:* 1. Turbuhaler (Symbicort, AZ) 2. Turbuhaler (Pulmicort, AZ) *Duration:* 12 weeks *Run-in period:* 2–4 weeks	*Number randomised* 286 *Mean age (range) (years)* 1. 11 (4–17) 2. 11 (5–17) *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted (range)* 1. 74 (40–114) 2. 76 (40–100) *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* ICS at constant dose for at least 6 weeks prior to study (⩾400 μg BUD Turbuhaler, ⩾600 μg BUD via pMDI, ⩾375 μg FP or ⩾600 μg CFC–BDP)	*Outcomes* PEF (morning and evening) FEV_1 Symptom scores Daily use of rescue medication AEs

Exacerbations
Tal and colleagues[217] did not report asthma exacerbations as a specific outcome measure. However, it was reported that five children in the BUD/FF group had an exacerbation of asthma that was classed as a serious AE requiring admission to hospital. It is assumed from the text that there were no asthma exacerbations in the BUD group.

Adverse events
The two treatment groups were reported to be similar in terms of AE profiles, with similar proportions of patients in each group experiencing the most common AEs. Seven patients (4.7%) in the BUD/FF group had a serious AE requiring admission to hospital. A total of 18 children withdrew from treatment – nine children (6.1%) in the BUD/FF group and nine (6.5%) in the BUD group.

Summary
Only one trial evaluated the effectiveness of BUD/FF delivered in combination via a single inhaler compared with BUD alone. It was a large, international, multi-centre study, of parallel-group design and high methodological quality. The combination of FF and BUD resulted in statistically significant improvements in lung function compared with BUD therapy alone. The safety profile of the two groups appeared to be similar, as was the improvement in symptoms and use of rescue medication.

Summary of Q3b: ICS/LABA or similar dose ICS
Summaries of the results are given in *Tables 27* and *28*.

Review of question 4 – ICS/LABA administered in separate or combination inhalers

FP/SAL in combination inhaler versus FP + SAL in separate inhalers

Study characteristics
One parallel group RCT[218] evaluated the effectiveness of FP/SAL in combination compared with FP plus SAL taken concurrently and was published in 2000 (*Table 29*). This study was a multi-centre trial with 35 centres and the study sample size was 257 participants. No power calculation to ascertain an adequate sample size was reported.

The trial compared FP/SAL 200/100 µg/day via Diskus inhaler (Seretide, GSK) in one trial arm with FP 200 µg/day plus SAL 100 µg/day also via Diskus inhalers (it is not explicitly stated, but can be deduced from the text, that devices were supplied by GSK) in the second trial arm. The treatment duration was 12 weeks. The aim of the study was to compare the safety and efficacy of a combination of the two groups with those of the two drugs separately in children with asthma that was poorly controlled by ICS alone.

The mean age of the participants in the trial was 7.6 years. The children were all poorly controlled by ICS therapy alone (BDP or BUD or flunisolide 400–500 µg/day or FP 200–250 µg/day). The mean baseline FEV_1 % predicted was 86% in the combination therapy arm and 84% in the concurrent therapy arm.

The quality of reporting and methodology of the study was generally inadequate. The method of randomisation and allocation concealment was not reported. The study did, however, report that data were analysed on an ITT population, but the method undertaken to achieve this was assessed to be inadequate.

Results
Lung function
Van den Berg and colleagues[218] presented data on the adjusted mean change from baseline in FEV_1. At 12 weeks this was 0.21 litres in the SAL/FP combination group and 0.13 litres in the FP plus SAL group (difference –0.08 litres, 95% CI –0.14 to –0.01, $p = 0.052$), suggesting that the difference is of borderline significance.

For morning PEF, the adjusted mean change from baseline was 33 l/minute in the combination therapy group compared with 28 l/minute in the concurrent therapy group. The mean difference between groups (separate inhalers – combination inhaler) (–5 l/minute, 90% CI –10 to 0.1/minute, $p = 0.103$) was shown to be within the defined limits for equivalence (the criterion being ±15 l/minute). Similar, non-statistically significant differences were seen with adjusted mean change in evening PEF (FP/SAL 29 l/minute, FP plus SAL 25 l/minute, $p = 0.164$).

Symptoms/health-related quality of life
SFDs were reported to be similar between groups in the trial by Van den Berg and colleagues,[218] but no data were reported to support this.

Use of rescue medication
Van den Berg and colleagues[218] reported that there were no differences between the FP/SAL and the FP plus SAL groups on the need for rescue medication, but no data were presented to support this.

TABLE 27 *FP versus FP/SAL (1 RCT)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms				HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS					
200 vs 200/100 μg	Malone,[214] 12 weeks, parallel, double-blind, DPI, $n = 203$	FP							C[a]		C		C	
		FP/SAL	F	F	F							F		

C, stated to be comparable between trial arms but statistical tests not reported; F, results favour this trial arm but statistical tests not reported; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); blank cells signify no data reported on outcome.
[a] Day-time symptom scores.

TABLE 28 *BUD versus BUD/FF (1 RCT)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms				HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS					
400 vs 400/18 μg	Tal,[217] 12 weeks, parallel, double-blind, DPI, $n = 286$	BUD					NSD[a]		NSD		C		C	
		BUD/FF	+	+	+									

C, stated to be comparable between trial arms but statistical tests not reported; *n*, number of events; NSD; no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); +, indicates results significantly favour this trial arm; blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.
[a] Defined as a night and day without symptoms and no asthma-related nocturnal awakenings.

TABLE 29 *Study characteristics (FP/SAL combination versus separate inhalers)*

Study	Design	Intervention	Patients	Outcomes
Van den Berg *et al.*, 2000[218]	RCT Multi-centre Parallel-group Double-blind	*Drugs:* 1. FP/SAL 100/50 μg b.d. (daily total 200/100 μg) + placebo 2. FP + SAL 100 + 50 μg b.d. (daily total 200 + 100 μg) *Delivery device:* 1. Diskus (Seretide, GSK[a]) + Diskus 2. Diskus (Flixotide, GSK[a]) *Duration:* 12 weeks *Run-in period:* 2 weeks	*Number randomised* 257 *Mean age (years)* 7.6 (4–11) *Baseline FEV_1 % predicted* Not reported *Previous ICS treatment (drug and dose)* BDP, BUD 400–500 μg/day, flunisolide 200–250 μg/day constant for 4 weeks prior to study	*Outcomes* FEV_1 Mean PEF (morning and evening) AEs

[a] Not stated explicitly, but deduced from the text.

Exacerbations
No data on exacerbations were reported.

Adverse events
There were 13 children with AEs in the FP/SAL group and six in the FP + SAL group. No analysis for statistical significance was undertaken on this data.

Summary
In this multi-centre trial, no differences between treatment with FP/SAL in a combination inhaler and FP plus SAL in separate inhalers were observed on measures of lung function, symptoms, use of rescue medication or AEs.

Summary of Q4: ICS/LABA administered in separate or combination inhalers
A summary of the results is given in *Table 30*.

Review question 5 – combination inhaler compared with combination inhaler
No RCTs of this comparison were identified.

Cochrane systematic reviews
Five Cochrane systematic reviews[186–190] evaluating various ICS treatments for chronic asthma in adults and children were identified in searches. The reviews were published between 2000 and 2006 and are briefly described individually below.

It is important to note that these reviews had slightly different inclusion criteria to the current assessment (e.g. when comparing ICS and LABA to ICS alone, the former could be delivered in separate inhalers in addition to combination inhalers). Further, only a relatively small proportion of the included studies in each review comprised children under 12 years. Their results are provided here as context within which to interpret the results of the current assessment.

Adams and colleagues[187] – FP versus BDP or BUD
This review[187] evaluated the effectiveness and safety of three inhaled corticosteroids – FP was compared with either BDP or BUD. The review was first published in Issue 1, 2001, and was last updated in May 2005 (searches up to January 2005). The review included prospective RCTs of parallel or cross-over design in both adults and children (aged >2 years) with chronic asthma. The interventions included any dose of FP compared with any dose of BDP or BUD, with a treatment period of 1 week or longer.

The review found 57 studies which met the inclusion criteria, involving 12,614 participants. Fourteen of the studies were in children, with the remaining studies conducted in adolescents and adults. The asthma severity of the participants in the trials varied from mild (eight studies), mild to moderate (12 studies), moderate (12 studies), moderate to severe (16 studies), severe (six studies), and mild to severe (two studies), with severity being unclear in one trial. In the majority of studies, some or all of the participants were using regular inhaled corticosteroids at the time of enrolment.

Results
Dose ratio 1:2
FP resulted in a significantly greater absolute FEV_1 compared with BDP/BUD (mean difference 0.09 litres, 95% CI 0.03 to 0.15 litres). However, when reported as change from baseline, there was no significant difference between groups (mean difference 0.01 litres, 95% CI –0.02 to 0.05 litres). Similarly, there was no significant difference between groups in absolute FEV_1 % predicted (mean difference 0.50%, 95% CI –1.28 to 2.28%) or change from baseline FEV_1 % predicted (mean difference –1.04%, 95% CI –3.55 to 1.47%).

Treatment with FP led to a significantly greater morning PEF compared with BDP/BUD (mean difference 9.32 l/minute, 95% CI 5.96 to 12.69 l/minute), but not evening PEF (mean difference 4.67 l/minute, 95% CI –1.36 to 10.7 l/minute). When reported as change from baseline, there was no significant difference between groups (mean difference 1.68 l/minute, 95% CI –1.93 to 5.29 l/minute).

Symptoms and rescue medication use were widely reported but differences in the reporting of these outcomes precluded the pooling of data for meta-analysis. The review only reported on specific AEs, and data on morning plasma cortisol and 24-hour urinary cortisol were limited. No significant differences were observed between FP and BDP/BUD for trial withdrawals (OR 0.76, 95% CI 0.53 to 1.09, 12 studies), or in the likelihood of experiencing an asthma exacerbation (OR 0.75, 95% CI 0.52 to 1.08, three studies).

Dose ratio 1:1
A significant difference in absolute FEV_1 was found in favour of FP (mean difference 0.09 litres, 95% CI 0.02 to 0.17 litres). However, when reported as change from baseline, there was no significant difference between groups (mean difference 0.04 litres, 95% CI –0.03 to 0.11 litres).

TABLE 30 *FP/SAL versus separate FP + SAL (1 RCT)*

Daily dose	Study, design, duration, device, number randomised	ICS in each trial arm	Results											
			Lung function			Symptoms								
			FEV_1	PEF morning	PEF evening	NW	SFD	SFN	SS	HRQoL	Rescue medication	Exacerbations	AEs (% of patients)	Adrenal markers
200/100 µg vs 200 + 100 µg	Van den Berg,[218] 12 weeks, parallel, double-blind, DPI, *n* = 257	FP/SAL FP + SAL	NSD[a]	NSD NID	NSD		C				C		C	

C, stated to be comparable between trial arms but statistical tests not reported; *n*, number of events; NID, non-inferiority/equivalence demonstrated; NSD, no significant difference between trial arms; NW, nocturnal waking; SFD, symptom-free days; SFN, symptom-free nights; SS, symptom score (varies between studies); blank cells signify no data reported on that outcome.

[a] $p = 0.052$.

Morning PEF was significantly better with FP compared with BDP (mean difference 8.78 l/minute, 95% CI 5.14 to 12.41 l/minute). Evening PEF was also significantly better with FP (mean difference 6.37 l/minute, 95% CI 2.75 to 9.99 l/minute).

Treatment with FP resulted in a significant reduction in the odds of an asthma exacerbation (OR 0.77, 95% CI 0.59 to 0.99, four studies). However, when a random effects model was applied to the meta-analysis due to study heterogeneity, the difference became insignificant. No significant differences were observed between FP and BDP/BUD for trial withdrawals (OR 0.72, 95% CI 0.38 to 1.35, five studies). Differences in the reporting of measures of symptoms and rescue medication use meant that only limited studies could be included in a meta-analysis. There was no significant difference between groups in the proportion of SFDs (three studies), day- or night-time score (two studies), the number of participants experiencing SFDs or SFNs (two studies) or the use of rescue medication use (two studies).

Lasserson and colleagues[190] – FP versus HFA–BDP for chronic asthma in adults and children

This review[190] aimed to determine the efficacy of FP compared with HFA–BDP. The review was first published in Issue 4, 2005, and was last updated in January 2006 (searches up to January 2006). The review included RCTs of parallel or cross-over design in both adults and children with chronic asthma. The interventions included CFC– or HFA–FP compared with HFA–BDP.

The review found eight studies which met the inclusion criteria, involving 1260 participants. Only one of the studies was conducted in children. The HFA–BDP used in all the studies was extra fine, and all the studies had a nominal dose ratio of 1:1. Treatment duration ranged from 3 to 12 weeks. The majority of participants were adults with baseline symptoms and lung function indicating moderate asthma.

Results

Parallel trials

No significant difference in change in FEV_1 was observed between the HFA–BDP and FP groups [weighted mean difference (WMD) 0.04 litres, 95% CI –0.03 to 0.11]. Similarly, no significant difference was observed in change from baseline in morning PEF (WMD –2.31 l/minute, 95% CI –12.53 to 7.91).

Differences in the way in which data were reported meant that meta-analysis was not undertaken for most of the other outcome measures. Individual studies reported no significant differences between treatment groups for symptom scores, HRQoL or asthma exacerbations. Whereas three trials found no difference in the use of rescue medication (reported in various ways), one trial reported a significant difference in the medians which favoured FP (0.28 versus 0 puffs/day, $p = 0.04$). No significant difference was found in the rate of any AE [relative risk (RR) 0.88, 95% CI 0.72 to 1.08].

Cross-over trials

Of the three RCTs of cross-over design, one was a fully published paper and two were conference abstracts only. Therefore, there are limited data to report in this category.

One trial reported no significant difference between FP and HFA–BDP in FEV_1 % predicted or morning PEF. One trial also reported in the text that there were no differences between treatment groups in FEV_1 or morning PEF but did not present any data. The third study did not indicate whether reported FEV_1 data were significantly different.

The trials in this category did not report any data on symptoms, HRQoL, rescue medication use, asthma exacerbations or withdrawals.

Ni Chroinin and colleagues[189] – LABAs versus placebo in addition to ICS in children and adults with chronic asthma

This review[189] assessed the effectiveness and safety of adding a LABA to inhaled corticosteroids compared with inhaled corticosteroids alone. The review was first published in Issue 4, 2005, and was last updated in June 2005 (searches up to April 2004). The review included RCTs of parallel or cross-over design in both adults and children (aged >2 years) with chronic asthma who had previously received ICS therapy. The interventions included a LABA (SAL or FF) or placebo administered daily for at least 30 days, added to ICS (e.g. FP, BDP, BUD, triamcinolone acetonide). The dose of ICS had to be the same in both the LABA and ICS alone groups.

The review included 26 studies involving 8147 participants which met the inclusion criteria and provided data in sufficient detail. Eight of the studies were in children, with the remaining studies conducted in adolescents and adults. LABA was added to BUD in seven trials, to BDP in three trials, to BDP or BUD in one trial and to

FP in four trials, with the ICS being unspecified in 11 studies. Most of the studies used separate inhaler devices for ICS and LABA (n = 19) and the study duration was 4 months or less in most trials. Participants in the majority of trials had inadequate asthma control, and the severity of asthma was mild (n = 8 trials) or moderate (n = 18 trials). In adult studies the mean age of participants ranged from 35 to 48 years and in children the mean age ranged from 8.5 to 14 years.

Results

Compared with ICS alone, the addition of LABA to ICS provided a significantly greater improvement in change from baseline FEV_1 (WMD 0.170 litres, 95% CI 0.11 to 0.24 litres) and change in FEV_1 % predicted (WMD 2.79%, 95% CI 1.89 to 3.69%). Similarly, treatment with LABA + ICS led to a significantly greater improvement in change from baseline in morning PEF (WMD 23.28 l/minute, 95% CI 18.38 to 28.18 l/minute) and evening PEF (WMD 21.33 l/minute, 95% CI 14.53 to 28.12 l/minute).

Use of LABA + ICS significantly reduced daytime symptoms [standardised mean difference (SMD) –0.34, 95% CI –0.44 to –0.23, five studies], night-time symptoms (SMD –0.18, 95% CI –0.31 to –0.05, two studies) and overall 24-hour symptoms (SMD –0.28, 95% CI –0.45 to –0.11, two studies). The addition of LABA was also significantly more favourable in terms of change from baseline in SFDs (WMD 17.21%, 95% CI 12.06 to 22.36%, six studies) and SFNs (SMD 0.51, 95% CI 0.28 to 0.74, four studies). There were no significant differences between groups in change in percentage of nights with no awakenings or in night-time awakenings.

The addition of LABA to ICS significantly reduced the need for rescue medication use in terms of the change in overall 24-hour use (WMD –0.81 puffs/day, 95% CI –1.17 to –0.44, eight studies). The addition of LABA also significantly reduced the risk of asthma exacerbations requiring systemic steroids by 19% (RR 0.81, 95% CI 0.73 to 0.90, 17 studies). There was no group difference in the risk of overall AEs (RR 0.98, 95% CI 0.92 to 1.05, 11 studies), serious AEs (RR 1.16, 95% CI 0.30 to 4.42, four studies) or withdrawals due to AEs (RR 1.29, 95% CI 0.96 to 1.75, 23 studies).

Adams and colleagues[186] – BDP versus BUD for chronic asthma

This review assessed clinical outcomes in studies which compared BDP with BUD delivered at the same nominal daily dose. The review was published in Issue 1, 2000, and was last updated in November 1999 (searches up to 1999, month not specified). The review included RCTs of either parallel-group or cross-over design. Studies were eligible for inclusion if they included adults or children over 2 years old with chronic asthma. The drugs could be delivered by different devices (pMDI, MDI + spacer, DPI), and there does not appear to have been any restriction on the length of treatment period.

The review found 24 studies (five parallel-group and 19 cross-over trials) published between 1982 and 1988 which met the inclusion criteria. Four of these were only available in abstract form and did not report any outcome data. Two of the citations were not assessed for the review as they required translation. Eighteen of the studies were conducted in adults and six studies were in children, with a total of 1174 participants in the included trials. The level of asthma control at randomisation was not well described in the majority of studies, and asthma severity at baseline was not well documented. One study stated that patients had asthma of moderate severity, one described patients as having fairly severe asthma and two reported severe asthma. In 20 of the studies, patients were not previous regular users of oral corticosteroids (OCSs). In three of the studies, prior OCS use was an inclusion criterion, and a proportion of patients in another trial had received OCS treatment at the time of enrolment. Twelve studies lasted from 2 to 4 weeks, 10 treated patients from 6 to 12 weeks and one study treated patients for 2 years. One of the studies had a complex trial design with treatment periods of variable length. Only two of the cross-over trials had a wash-out period. The majority of trials assessed daily doses of 400 µg/day (n = 10) or 800 µg/day (n = 7), although one study assessed doses of 200 µg/day and two studies used higher doses of 1500–1600 µg/day. An MDI device was used to deliver both drugs in eight of the studies, but the other 16 used different delivery devices for each drug.

Results

Meta-analysis by Adams and colleagues[186] found no statistically significant differences between BDP and BUD for any of the outcome measures relevant to the present review. Results were presented separately for cross-over trials with no prior OCS, parallel-group trials, and cross-over trials with prior OCS. Comparisons reported below were for BDP versus BUD.

FEV_1 was reported by six cross-over studies of people with no prior OCS and two parallel-group studies. The WMD was –0.08 litres (95% CI –0.27 to 0.12) in the cross-over studies of people with no prior OCS and –0.02 (95% CI –0.23 to 0.20) in the parallel-group studies. FEV_1 predicted was also reported by two cross-over studies of people with no prior OCS [WMD –5.04 litres (95% CI –11.98 to 1.89)]. Morning and evening PEF reported in diary cards also showed no statistically significant difference between the two drugs. The pooled cross-over trials where patients had no prior OCS had a WMD of –2.99 l/minute (95% CI –28.43 to 22.45) for morning PEF (six trials) and –5.47 l/minute (95% CI –31.50 to 20.56) for the five trials reporting evening PEF. Similar, non-statistically significant differences were observed in three cross-over trials whose patients had previously received OCS. Corresponding analysis for one parallel-group RCT found a WMD of –18.00 l/minute (95% CI –54.76 to 18.76) for morning PEF and –8.00 l/minute (95% CI –49.29 to 33.29) for evening PEF.

The studies reported asthma symptoms using a range of measures, and no significant differences between treatments were reported for any of these measures. Meta-analysis of daily symptom score in five studies found no statistically significant difference between BDP and BUD [SMD 0.08 (95% CI –0.22 to 0.39)]. Similarly, use of rescue medication was not reported to differ statistically significantly between the two drugs. AEs were not pooled due to lack of clear reporting in the original trials. One parallel-group study reported an RR of 1.76 (BDP versus BUD) for withdrawal due to an asthma exacerbation (95% CI 0.44 to 7.10).

Greenstone and colleagues[188] – combination of LABA and ICS versus higher dose ICS in children and adults with persistent asthma

This review assessed clinical outcomes in studies which compared combination treatment of twice daily LABA and ICS against the use of a higher dose of ICS. The review was published in Issue 4, 2005, and was last updated in July 2005 (searches up to April 2004). The review included RCTs of adults or children over 2 years old with chronic asthma, with a minimum duration of 30 days' treatment.

The review found 42 studies published as 26 full-text papers and 16 abstracts, 13 of which provided insufficient data to be included in the meta-analysis. One of the trials had two intervention groups compared with a control group, and these were analysed as separate trials, so the review was therefore based on data from 30 trials with a total of 9509 participants. One trial was a cross-over study and the rest were of parallel-group design. The majority of trials (n = 27) were based on adult participants and three focused on children. Participants' asthma was generally of moderate severity and was inadequately controlled at baseline in all but two of the studies. Patients were required to have used ICS for at least 1–3 months before entry to all but one of the trials.

SAL was used as the LABA in 24 of the trials, with FF being used in the other eight trials. Standard doses of LABA were used in the majority of trials (n = 27). Most of the trials (n = 25) used the same ICS in both the LABA and control groups; 11 used CFC–BDP, four used BUD and ten used FP. Three trials compared FP and LABA with CFC–BDP, BUD or HFA–BDP. One study compared the combination of LABA and the patients' usual ICS to additional FP in the higher ICS study arm, and one study compared BUD and LABA with FP. The median ICS dose in the combined LABA group was 400 µg/day (range 200–1000 µg/day) and 1000 µg/day (range 400–2000 µg/day) in the higher ICS dose group. ICS and LABA drugs were delivered via separate devices in 22 trials, but eight trials used a single device to deliver the drugs. Most of the trials lasted for 12 or 24 weeks (n = 14, n = 9), with others lasting 4 weeks (n = 1), 6 weeks (n = 1), 52 weeks (n = 3) or 54 weeks (n = 1).

Results

The review's main outcome measure was the risk of exacerbation requiring systemic corticosteroids, and this was reported by 15 of the trials. Pooled data gave an RR of 0.88 (95% CI 0.77 to 1.02), with no significant group difference [risk difference (RD) 2% (95% CI 0 to 4%)]. Although the similarity between treatments did not meet Greenstone and colleagues' *a priori* definition of equivalence,[188] the upper CI was reported to exclude the likelihood of a higher rate of exacerbations in patients who received LABA. Planned subgroup analyses found no effect of age group (children versus adults), average baseline severity, type of LABA ICS dose difference between groups, ICS dose associated with LABA and trial duration. However, meta-regression of 13 trials found two independent variables which significantly reduced the risk of exacerbation [low ICS dose used in combination with LABA (p = 0.046) and trial duration of 24 weeks or less (p = 0.01)].

Lung function showed a statistically significantly greater improvement in the combination LABA and ICS groups than in the high-dose ICS group. Using pooled data from nine trials, the weighted mean difference in FEV_1 at end-point was 0.13 litres (95% CI 0.08 to 0.19). Similarly, change from baseline FEV_1 showed a WMD of 0.10 litres (95% CI 0.07 to 0.12; $n = 7$ trials) and FEV_1 % predicted at end-point had a WMD of 3.93% (95% CI 1.33 to 6.53; $n = 4$ trials). The WMDs for morning and evening PEF at end-point were 27.33 l/minute (95% CI 21.39 to 33.26; $n = 14$ trials) and 20.18 l/minute (95% CI 12.75 to 27.62; $n = 3$ trials), respectively.

Patients treated with a combination of ICS and LABA had statistically significantly better changes from baseline total asthma symptom scores. Data from five trials were pooled, giving an SMD of –0.23 (95% CI –0.41 to –0.05). The percentage of SFDs at end-point also favoured combination therapy in pooled analysis of eight trials (WMD = 11.9%, 95% CI 7.37 to 16.44). Change in rescue inhalations over 24 hours favoured the combination treatment group (ICS + LABA) over the high-dose ICS group. Data from eight trials were pooled to give an SMD of –0.22 (95% CI –0.29 to –0.14). There were no statistically significant differences between the groups in day-time symptoms at end-point, night-time symptoms, percentage of SFDs at end-point, change from baseline in night-time awakenings and quality of life as measured by the Juniper Questionnaire. There were no group differences in overall side-effects [RR = 0.93 (95% CI 0.84 to 1.03); $n = 15$ trials], serious AEs [RR = 1.54 (95% CI 0.72 to 3.21); $n = 5$ trials] or withdrawals due to AEs [RR = 0.94 (95% CI 0.71 to 1.24); $n = 18$ trials].

Chapter 4
Economic analyses

Purpose of this chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to:

1. Summarise existing published economic evaluations that are relevant to the decision problems specified in the project scope and protocol.
2. Summarise the industry-submitted economic evaluations provided as part of the NICE appraisal process, with particular focus on critically appraising those that are relevant to the decision problems specified in the project scope.
3. Describe the methods of the new economic evaluation(s), cost comparisons and other economic information which has been generated to try and help consider the 'value for money' implications for the NHS of alternative guidance on the use of corticosteroids in children with asthma.

Additionally, we outline the approach we have taken to assessing the cost-effectiveness or, more broadly – given the lack of clear evidence of differential effectiveness for all but one of the cost-effectiveness research questions – the 'value for money' to the NHS of the alternative asthma treatments evaluated.

Systematic review of cost-effectiveness studies

A systematic review of existing cost-effectiveness studies was undertaken.

Search strategy and critical appraisal methods

MEDLINE, EMBASE and the Cochrane Library (Issue 1, 2006) were searched for cost-effectiveness studies that assessed the cost-effectiveness of BDP, BUD or FP used alone or in combination with a LABA, SAL or FF within their licensed indications and the appropriate step of the BTS/SIGN Guideline.[1] The full search strategy is shown in Appendix 3.

A total of 723 titles and abstracts were screened for inclusion in the review. These included studies that were potentially relevant to the present assessment and also those relevant to a linked assessment on the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids and LABAs for the treatment of chronic asthma in adults. Of the titles and abstracts screened, 58 were ordered as full papers and assessed in detail.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Cost-effectiveness analyses (CEAs), cost–utility analyses (CUAs), cost–benefit analyses and cost–consequence analyses were eligible for inclusion in the cost-effectiveness review. In addition, separate submissions were received from GSK, AZ, Meda Pharmaceuticals and Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals as part of the NICE technology appraisals process.

Published cost-effectiveness studies

No cost-effectiveness studies for the relevant comparators in the treatment of chronic asthma in children less than 12 years of age were identified.

Cost-effectiveness studies provided by industry

Four submissions to NICE included CEA analysis. Two of these included CEA and two included cost minimisation analysis (CMA). Submissions were made by GSK, AZ, Meda Pharmaceuticals and Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals. *Table 31* shows a summary of the submissions received by industry through the appraisal process.

TABLE 31 *Summary of the submissions received by industry through the appraisal process*

Manufacturer	Product	Type of analysis
GSK	Becotide Flixotide Seretide	CEA
AZ	Pulmicort Symbicort	CEA
Meda Pharmaceuticals	Novolizer	CMA
Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals	Modulite	CMA

Below, an outline review of each of the manufacturer's submissions (CEA, CMA) is presented. This outline review is based on a checklist suggested for critical appraisal CEA by Drummond and colleague[219] and the requirements of NICE for submissions on CEA (reference case),[220] and where appropriate a suggested guideline for good-practice in cost-effectiveness models by Philips and colleagues.[221]

Review of the submission by GlaxoSmithKline

Overview

The submission by GSK to NICE includes an economics commentary and CEA to support three GSK products; BDP (Becotide), FP (Flixotide) and a combination inhaler containing FP/SAL xinafoate in combination) (Seretide).

The submission includes some commentary on the clinical equivalence of ICS products and the presentation of some price estimates. The submission does not include any CEA for BDP and FP versus other ICS products, with a CMA approach assumed due to clinical equivalence across these products. This is justified in the submission on the basis of assumed equivalence. The submission also does not include any CEA for Seretide versus Symbicort, as the submission states there is an absence of head-to-head comparisons of the clinical effectiveness of these products.

The submission is focused on four specific research questions:

- Q1: For patients taking ICS alone, is FP the most clinically effective ICS?
- Q2: For patients uncontrolled on ICS alone, is switching to Seretide more clinically effective than remaining on the same dose or increasing the dose of ICS alone?
- Q3: Where a LABA and ICS are to be co-prescribed, is Seretide more clinically effective than ICS and LABA delivered in separate inhalers?
- Q4: In patients where combination therapy is appropriate, what is the relative clinical effectiveness of Seretide compared with Symbicort?

The submission presents outline detail of a systematic search of the literature on CEAs for the treatment of asthma. Appendix 9 of the submission provides information on this review, but the literature is not considered relevant. The submission presents specific cost-effectiveness analyses, and a generic cost-effectiveness model to address questions 2 and 3. Question 1 is not covered further (as above, a CMA approach is assumed) and question 4 is addressed via a comparison of product costs only.

Model on cost-effectiveness of Seretide

In the submission, a new model is developed by GSK to estimate the cost-effectiveness of the alternative treatment scenarios. A common model is used for the analysis of both adult and child treatment for asthma. Below we outline the approach taken for the GSK model and provide an outline review.

The model presented is a simple two-state model applying effectiveness data on the percentage of symptom-free days (% SFDs), cost and outcome data associated with the two health states of 'symptom-free' and 'with symptoms'. The model is essentially a spreadsheet calculation to estimate cost-effectiveness from these related data across alternative treatments. In the model, at a given point in time, patients are either (1) symptom-free or (2) with symptoms. Death is not included in the model (due to an assumption of no differential effect of treatments). Exacerbations are not included in the model. The model is not a disease progression model, and does not involve transitions between the two health states over time. The model presents a scenario, showing occupancy of states "conditional on treatment choice" on the basis of a meta-analysis of the % SFDs at the trial end-point. This end-point is chosen as it was (1) commonly reported and considered, (2) based on clinical opinion, and (3) judged to be more appropriate than lung function for representing patients' clinical response to treatment. This reported end-point (% SFDs) was taken to represent the proportion of time spent in the symptom-free state. The model used effectiveness data from four trials: two for Seretide versus the same dose of FP, one for Seretide versus an increased dose of FP and one for Seretide versus the same dose delivered via separate products.

The model is based on a range of assumptions, including the assumptions that:

- Alternative therapies have the same mortality profile and the same toxicity profile (including long-term effects).
- The differential proportion of time patients spend in the symptom-free state over their treatment lifetime would be the same as the

differential proportion observed during the trial period (even though clinical trials are mainly 12 weeks).
- Trial-based data are generalisable to wider patient populations.
- There is no difference in the effectiveness between different inhaler devices.

The submission states that the time horizon is "nominally 1 year, corresponding to the duration of the GOAL trial used to estimate costs and utilities". However, given the nature of the model, it is a 'snap-shot' or cross-sectional approach to estimating CEA.

The model uses health state values of 0.97 for the 'symptom-free' health state and 0.85 for the 'with symptoms' health state, a utility decrement of 0.12. These values are cited from the CEA study for the GOAL RCT reported by Briggs and colleagues.[222] However, this study does not provide information on the methods used for estimating utility weights, citing a personal communication only, for a study mapping Asthma Quality of Life Questionnaire (AQLQ) to EQ-5D. The model works by placing proportions of patients (or patient time) in each health state, according to the effectiveness data, and calculating QALY differences as the product of these data [e.g. a 12.29% difference in % SFDs (low-dose Seretide versus FP 200 µg/day) results in a difference in QALYs between treatments of 0.014748].

Although the data from the GOAL clinical trial are based on an adult patient group, the GSK submission states that these data are considered to be the most appropriate for use in the paediatric analysis. No justification is provided in the submission to support this.

Costs are comprised of mean acquisition costs for products and an estimate of the annual mean 'other health service' costs for symptom-free time and time with symptoms. The latter 'other' cost excludes primary treatment costs. The cost estimates used for the health states are based on data from the GOAL clinical trial, which comprised resource use against secondary care visits, primary care visits and rescue medication used. The submission uses a linear regression model to estimate a mean annual cost, which is £79.83 for the health state 'with symptoms' and £1.57 for 'symptom-free'. The cost differences between alternatives is as per the above example for QALY differences, with estimated difference in costs for strategies multiplied by the percentage difference in SFDs.

The model is developed for use in both adult and child patient groups, and is arranged around 21 specific cost-effectiveness questions (five for children, 16 for adults). All costs are reported in UK£ 2006.

Model/cost-effectiveness results

The CEA is arranged around the comparison of Seretide (FP 200/SAL 100 µg/day) with (i) the same dose of ICS alone (FP), (ii) a higher dose of ICS alone (FP 400 µg/day) and (iii) ICS + LABA in separate inhalers (at same dose). The analysis also considers a comparison with Symbicort (at BUD 400/FF 100 µg/day). The submission reports results for different product costs for Seretide (for Evohaler and Accuhaler) and against two different ICS product costs (FP and BDP). Therefore, the analysis results in approximately 10 different summary statistics. These are summarised below:

- Q1: Seretide 200/100 µg/day versus the same dose of ICS minus a LABA (FP 200 µg/day) – incremental cost-effectiveness ratio (ICERs) range: Seretide £31,388 (Evohaler, versus comparator price at £91.31) to £72,702 per additional QALY. For all scenarios the incremental effect is 3.61% in % SFDs, incremental QALYs are 0.0043 and 'other costs' are reduced by –£2.83. Incremental drug/treatment costs range from £138 to £317.
- Q2: Seretide 200/100 µg/day versus a higher dose ICS alone (FP 400 µg/day) – ICER range: Seretide at £15,739 (Evohaler, versus comparator price at £178.97) to Seretide at £63,736 per QALY (with comparator price at £178.97). For all scenarios the incremental effect is 2.60% in % SFDs, incremental QALYs are 0.0031 and 'other costs' are reduced by –£2.03. Incremental drug/treatment costs range from £51 to £201.
- Q3: Seretide 200/100 µg/day versus FP 200 + SAL 100 µg/day (separate inhalers) – ICERs: Seretide dominates for all comparisons (cost saving and greater effect). For all scenarios the incremental effect is 1.90% in % SFDs, incremental QALYs are 0.0023 and 'other costs' are reduced by –£1.49. Drug/treatment costs for comparators are all lower for Seretide, from –£47.48 to –£226.45.
- Q4: Seretide 200/100 µg/day versus Symbicort [BUD 400 µg/day, (inhaler type100/6)] – no CEA undertaken, acquisition cost comparisons only, with Seretide Evohaler at £230.11 versus £401.78, and Accuhaler at £379.86 versus £401.78, both presented as Seretide being cost saving (acquisition costs).

A number of factors are considered in the analysis (e.g. dose, price), resulting in a range of cost-effectiveness results. The TAR team suggest that policy makers should take note of the specific inputs for analysis and consider the interpretation of results. For example, estimated cost savings and estimated incremental QALYs are very small, and some consideration should be given to their significance and/or meaningfulness.

Outline appraisal of the cost-effectiveness analysis undertaken

A critical appraisal checklist is given in *Table 32* and NICE reference case requirements in *Table 33*.

TABLE 32 *Critical appraisal checklist of economic evaluation by GSK*

Item	Critical appraisal	Reviewer comment
Is there a well-defined question?	Yes	4 clinical questions stated (2 of which covered in CEA)
Is there a clear description of alternatives?	Yes	Seretide versus comparators (various options stated with comparisons against the same dose of FP alone, an increased dose of FP alone, single versus combination inhaler and Symbicort. Analysis against comparable dose of BDP alone was presented as a sensitivity analysis)
Has the correct patient group/population of interest been clearly stated?	Partial	Children under 12 years old is the patient group under consideration; however, many of the data are from adult patient groups (aged 12+ years)
Is the correct comparator used?	Yes	Sensitivity analysis undertaken for BDP versus Seretide. This is appropriate as it is the other single comparator under consideration with the same inhaler and propellant type (i.e. pMDI with HFA)
Is the study type reasonable?	Yes	CEA model used (CUA results presented)
Is the perspective of the analysis clearly stated?	Yes	Perspective stated as UK NHS
Is the perspective employed appropriate?	Cost: yes Outcomes: partial	Submission appears to adopt a UK NHS and PSS perspective for costs (consistent with NICE reference case). Perspective on outcomes is that of the patient, but not all effects considered
Is effectiveness of the intervention established?	Yes	The CEA is based on clinical effectiveness data from a small number of trials reporting the chosen economic end-point (% SFDs) – mainly over 12 weeks. Although the study demonstrates effectiveness over this one end-point, it does not discuss, in the context of CEA, the other effectiveness end-points across treatments. The study assumes that differences seen in trials can be generalised to the lifetime treatment period
Has a lifetime horizon been used for analysis (has a shorter horizon been justified)?	No	Nominal 1-year time horizon used (not lifetime) ICERs are based on 1-year cost and QALY differences
Are the costs and consequences consistent with the perspective employed?[a]	Partial	Costs appear to be consistent with perspective employed, but limited justification provided. Consequences limited to consequences of SFDs?
Is differential timing considered?	No	Nominal 1-year time frame used
Is incremental analysis performed?	Yes	
Is sensitivity analysis undertaken and presented clearly?	Yes	Yes, sensitivity analysis included, including probabilistic sensitivity analysis. No scenario analyses undertaken to consider different mean input parameters

PSS, Personal Social Services.
[a] More on data inputs for costs and consequences is given in the review of modelling methods below.

TABLE 33 *NICE reference case requirements – GSK submission*

NICE reference case requirement		Reviewer comment
Decision problem: as per the scope developed by NICE (especially technologies and patient group)	Partial	
Comparator: alternative therapies routinely used in the UK NHS	Yes	
Perspective on costs: NHS and PSS	Yes	
Perspective on outcomes: All health effects on individuals	No	Only SFDs were used to consider QALY values
Type of economic evaluation: CEA	Yes	
Synthesis of evidence on outcomes: based on a systematic review	Yes	
Measure of health benefits: QALYs	Yes	
Description of health states for QALY calculations: use of a standardised and validated generic instrument	Unclear	Method for estimating health state utilities is unclear
Method of preference elicitation for health state values: choice-based method (e.g. TTO, SG, not rating scale)	Unclear	Method of preference elicitation is not reported
Source of preference data: representative sample of the UK public	Unclear	
Discount rate: 3.5 per year for costs and health effects	NA	

NA, not applicable; PSS, Personal Social Services; SG, standard gamble; TTO, time trade-off.

Model structure/assumptions

The model structure is based around the clinical end-point in the GOAL trial of differences in the % SFDs, and this is assumed, in the submission, to be a reasonable reflection of relative treatment effectiveness. This may not be a reasonable assumption, as this end-point only reflects part of the effectiveness profile of asthma treatments. Other important elements of asthma control include night-time disturbances (and data presented in the submission indicate that differences between % SFNs may be smaller than % SFDs), lung function and exacerbations. The model presented does not directly capture these items The model structure used is stated to be based on the CEA for the GOAL clinical trial presented by Briggs and colleagues.[222] However, the model differs from the approach of Briggs and colleagues in a number of ways. First, the model presented by Briggs and colleagues uses patient-level data to derive transition probabilities; second, their study uses a composite measure of asthma control; and third, they also model the state of exacerbation. The estimates of cost-effectiveness presented by GSK are simple spreadsheet calculations combining data on % SFDs and data estimated for relative costs and QALYs for patients in the health states used. The model uses a two-state approach covering time in a symptom-free state and time with symptoms. This is a simplification of the disease process for asthma, and is stated to be driven by the availability of data for comparative purposes and on a review of the general literature on modelling asthma treatment. However, it may be that the end-point chosen is more favourable for comparison of Seretide with other alternative strategies. For example, the effect of Seretide will be more immediate on SFDs than it will be from ICS alone (where any treatment benefit will accrue more slowly over time). No discussion of other outcomes, in the context of the CEA, is provided for the discussion on the model structure, although a brief statement on the potential use of lung function as an alternative approach is provided.

When considering the above points, it is important to acknowledge that the literature on modelling cost-effectiveness in asthma treatment is sparse, and although there are guidelines for the treatment of asthma (e.g. the BTS/SIGN Guideline), it is generally difficult (given the current evidence base) to structure and populate a model which reflects such guidelines.

Data inputs

The primary data inputs for effectiveness, costs and outcomes are presented in the submission. In the analysis, there is a lack of transparency in the calculations for 'other costs', and there are concerns with the methods used to identify and

measure the 'other costs'. The data used on the resource for 'other costs' are taken from one clinical trial, the GOAL trial, by Bateman and colleagues,[223] but the specific data used are not presented in the submission. Furthermore, the generalisability of this study (a multi-national RCT, covering 44 countries) to the current analysis is not discussed. The GOAL CEA used data on resource use from all 44 countries in the trial, using a UK indicator variable in the analysis presented. However, the issue of how generalisable the GOAL study is to the UK context and also to a paediatric population is not discussed in the context of the current analysis. Unit costs for the resource use are taken from appropriate data sources. The submission uses a regression model to estimate other costs, based on an expected cost per week of £1.53 for people with asthma symptoms, a mean annual cost of £79.83. Where people with asthma are symptom-free, this is reduced to £0.03, a mean annual cost of £1.57. These cost estimates appear to be very low and the submission does not offer the opportunity to consider the appropriateness of the resource use to the UK treatment group. The submission has referred to the economic evaluation undertaken alongside the GOAL trial;[222] however, the publication for that particular evaluation does not offer detail on resource use. The regression analysis employed in the submission also differs from that presented by Briggs and colleagues.[222]

The cost for Seretide is based on its availability in two different inhaler devices (Accuhaler and Evohaler), with both prices from the Drug Tariff, together with an average price, used to generate a range of data on cost-effectiveness. A drug 'cost per day' is estimated for all treatment options. For example, in the model the estimated costs per day for Seretide 200/100 µg/day via Accuhaler and Seretide 200/100 µg/day via Evohaler + spacer are set at £1.04 and £0.63, respectively. For Symbicort 400 (100/6 µg/day), and ICS alone (FP 200 µg/day), the daily costs are estimated at £1.10 and £0.25, respectively. There are a range of approaches that can be taken to estimate daily costs, and the approach taken in the submission appears reasonable for the current analysis (Appendix 9 of the submission presents the methods used).

There is a lack of transparency over the calculation of health state utilities used in the model (with a citation to a personal communication). The general literature available to inform on health state values for asthma is sparse and undeveloped, and although the values used for symptom-free in the analysis seem relatively high (compared with some general population age-related values), the important issue is the incremental difference of 0.12 used between the health state of with symptoms and symptom-free.

The effectiveness data used in the CEA are from a limited number of available trials (as above, two for Seretide versus the same dose of FP, one for Seretide versus increased dose of FP and one for Seretide versus the same dose of separate products), and this is justified in the submission on the basis of a lack of consistency in the reporting of common outcomes across relevant trials. The use of these limited data may introduce bias to the estimates used, but this has not been discussed or considered in the sensitivity analysis. Effectiveness data from the trials presented are assumed to be generalisable to the treatment group in England and Wales that are the focus of policy analysis. Likewise, the treatment effect from short-term trials (mainly of 12 weeks' duration) is assumed to be appropriate over longer periods (e.g. 1 year).

Assessment of uncertainty

Uncertainty in the analyses is addressed using probabilistic sensitivity analysis (PSA). The PSA considered parameter uncertainty for the mean treatment effect and for 'other cost' and utility model inputs. The report submitted does not present discussion on the results of the PSA (additional material was submitted, providing a cost-effectiveness plane and cost-effectiveness acceptability curve for each of the 80+ analyses undertaken). Additionally, the report does not present any deterministic sensitivity analysis or address structural uncertainties via sensitivity analyses. Also, heterogeneity of the treatment group has not been considered against any defined subgroups.

Model validation

The submission states that checks were undertaken to consider the validity of the model, with a rebuild undertaken using a different software package. This presents evidence of the internal consistency (logic) of the model structure and data structure used.

Summary of general comments on the submission

1. The focus on % SFDs as a measure of asthma control and treatment effect may be limited and may not capture other important aspects of asthma control and/or effectiveness data (e.g. exacerbations, quality of life).

2. A limited evidence base is used to populate the model (e.g. only six trials used to derive effectiveness estimates).
3. The assumptions over the generalisability of trial data on effectiveness to a UK paediatric population and extrapolation of the treatment effect are not discussed.
4. There are concerns over the methods used and estimates used for 'other costs'.
5. There are concerns over the lack of transparency in estimating health state utilities and other cost estimates.
6. Data are assumed to be generalisable to a paediatric analysis, and it is assumed that:
   (a) Resource use data from the GOAL clinical trial are generalisable to a UK treatment group (aged under 12 years).
   (b) Health state utility values cited from the GOAL CEA[222] are generalisable to a UK treatment group aged under 12 years.

Review of the submission by AstraZeneca (AZ)

Overview

The submission by AZ to NICE includes economics commentary and CEA to support two AZ products; Pulmicort (BUD) and Symbicort (BUD/FF in combination).

The submission includes some commentary on the clinical equivalence of BUD with other ICS products and the presentation of some price estimates. It does not include any CEA for BUD versus other ICS products. There is limited discussion of the relative cost-effectiveness of different ICS products, with a CMA approach taken due to assumed clinical equivalence between products.

The CEA presented in the submission is to support the use of Symbicort (BUD/FF in combination). The submission refers to Symbicort fixed dose (FD), and Symbicort adjustable maintenance dose (AMD). The submission uses Symbicort FD as the base case for the CEA, working on the basis that Symbicort AMD has been shown to be superior to Symbicort FD. The submission compares Symbicort (Symbicort FD and AMD) with the use of ICS alone (high-dose), BUD and FF in separate inhalers and with Seretide (GSK combination product). However, no CEA is presented for Symbicort versus Seretide.

The submission consists of a brief discussion on the relevant literature (covering CEAs and modelling studies), and the presentation of the methods and results for a cost-effectiveness model developed for the submission to NICE.

A literature search is reported that aimed to identify CEAs on Symbicort. Nine studies were identified, all of which are stated to show Symbicort AMD or Symbicort SMART (Symbicort as both maintenance and reliever therapy) at an equivalent or increased efficacy compared with Symbicort FD (four studies), separate inhalers (three studies), high-dose FP (ICS alone) (one study) or Seretide (one study). All except one of these identified studies is stated to show cost savings from the use of Symbicort. None of the identified studies covered the population of children aged 4–11 years.

Model on cost-effectiveness of Symbicort

The submission states that the approach presented by Price and Briggs[224] was most appropriate for the analysis of Symbicort. However, it is also stated to have a number of limitations and a new model is developed by AZ for their submission. Below we outline the approach taken for the AZ model and provide an outline review.

A model was developed to capture the difference in exacerbations between comparisons and the difference in time spent in a non-exacerbation health state. It is a Markov-type model with four health states: non-exacerbation, mild exacerbation, severe exacerbation and treatment change. The last state is a form of absorbing state which reflects withdrawal from the treatment allocated. Where patients withdraw from treatment (undergo treatment change), they are subject to a second-line treatment regimen and are modelled in a parallel process to the main (first-line) model. When treatment is changed, it is in line with recommendations in the BTS/SIGN Guideline. The model uses a cycle of 4 weeks, and has a time horizon of 1 year (with a 5-year time horizon considered in sensitivity analysis). The model uses transition probabilities derived from two clinical trials, by Pohunek and colleagues[225] and Tal and colleagues.[217] One of these trials[225] is available as a published abstract only. The trials were both 12-week RCTs conducted in children aged 4–11 years[225] and children and adolescents aged 4–17 years.[217] Transition probabilities were from combined data from trial arms of Symbicort FD and the BUD + FF arm (administered as separate inhalers) assuming equivalent efficacy. Data on the relative effect (RRs for severe exacerbation, mild exacerbation and treatment change) of ICS alone

(and Symbicort AMD) were derived from clinical trial data for these comparators (two RCTs for ICS alone).[217,225] Patient-level trial data (over 12 weeks) allow the use of different transition probabilities for Symbicort over months 1–3, and thereafter a constant transition probability matrix is used based on events occurring during months 1–3. Analysis is presented for an asthma treatment group aged under 12 (4–11 years). In the model all persons start in the 'non-exacerbation' (controlled) health state. The perspective of the analysis is stated as UK NHS and Personal Social Services (PSS). Prices for asthma treatment are at a 2005–6 price year.

Health state utilities used for the model are based on EQ-5D tariff values. Health state descriptions covering the health states used in the model were collected from a sample of asthma patients, and EQ-5D tariff values for these states were applied (the submission cites Kind and colleagues 1999, for tariff values).[235] Values were presented for 'non-exacerbation' (no SABA use), 'non-exacerbation' (SABA use) (with proportions for SABA and non-SABA use applied to calculate a weighted utility value), 'mild exacerbation' and 'severe exacerbation' health states (all utility values applied are commercial-in-confidence). The model assumes that exacerbations affect costs and utilities for 1 week only, with the remaining 3 weeks in that cycle based on non-exacerbation status. Therefore, utility values for the mild and severe exacerbation states were weighted accordingly (data are commercial-in-confidence), based on 1 week of the exacerbation related value, plus 3 weeks at a non-exacerbation value.

A monthly cost is applied in the model based on asthma medication costs and health service consultations and hospitalisations. Primary care NHS resource use (consultations) are assumed to be the same for each of the treatment options and are not included in the model. The cost of managing a mild exacerbation is estimated at £49.46 and severe exacerbation between £333 and £1751.

Model/cost-effectiveness results

The submission presents summary results for outcomes and costs separately, in *Tables 9* and *10* (p. 28), respectively, and in an incremental analysis in *Table 11* (p. 29).

The submission presents results indicating that over a 12-month period Symbicort FD is dominated by the ICS alone treatment option (Symbicort with greater cost and less QALYs), dominated by Seretide (no difference in effect and Symbicort with greater cost), and Symbicort is dominant over ICS + LABA in separate inhalers (no difference in effect and Symbicort with lower cost).

In the opinion of the TAR team, it appears that any comparison rests on the incremental costs associated with 'maintenance costs' (drug/treatment acquisition costs).

Outline appraisal of the cost-effectiveness analysis undertaken

A critical appraisal checklist is given in *Table 34* and NICE reference case requirements in *Table 35*.

Model structure/assumptions

The model structure is driven by the use of exacerbation data, and the characterisation of a 'non-exacerbation' health state, using clinical trial data. The structure is not discussed and justified in the context of a coherent theory of asthma, and the model is essentially based around the availability of data surrounding exacerbations for Symbicort and comparators. It may be that AZ have adopted this approach due to the more positive profile of Symbicort (against exacerbation rates), when the use of an outcome related more directly to control, such as % SFDs, may have seemed more favourable for comparator products (e.g. Seretide). The submission indicates that a review of published modelling studies was undertaken, but no discussion is presented on alternative approaches. Given the prominence in the clinical and economic literature of outcome measures around lung function and symptoms, it would have been useful for some discussion of competing approaches for the modelling of asthma treatment and cost-effectiveness to have been presented.

The non-exacerbation health state presented is made up of patients who are without symptoms and those patients with symptoms, but not requiring any intervention from a healthcare professional. However, it is not clear how the data have been interpreted from different clinical trials, where the trial methods may not have been homogeneous. Much of the data to inform the model transitions have been taken from a limited evidence base, with citations to two published RCTs, with data on patient location in those RCTs over time being presented in commercial-in-confidence format only.

The cycle length and time horizon are justified (in the submission) on the basis of data available and an assumption that mortality effects (longer term outcomes) are similar across comparison

TABLE 34 *Critical appraisal checklist of economic evaluation by AZ*

Item	Critical appraisal	Reviewer comment
Is there a well-defined question?	Yes	
Is there a clear description of alternatives?	Yes	Symbicort versus comparators (various options stated).
Has the correct patient group/population of interest been clearly stated?	Yes	Children 4–11 years All patients in model start in non-exacerbation state (this may not be the case in practice, with a proportion of patients being in an 'uncontrolled' asthma state)
Is the correct comparator used?	Yes	Comparators used are all appropriate; however, other additional comparators could also be used
Is the study type reasonable?	Yes	CEA model used (CUA results presented)
Is the perspective of the analysis clearly stated?	Yes	Perspective stated as UK NHS and PSS
Is the perspective employed appropriate?	Partial Cost: yes Outcomes: partial	Submission appears to adopt a UK NHS and PSS perspective for costs (consistent with NICE reference case) Perspective on outcomes is that of the patient, but not all effects considered (the focus is on 'non-exacerbation' state, and exacerbation events, with no symptom-based measures used)
Is effectiveness of the intervention established?	Partial	The CEA is based on clinical effectiveness data from a limited number of trials reporting the chosen economic endpoint (exacerbation related states/outcomes) – mainly over 12 weeks. Primary effectiveness data from 2 RCTs form model transits. The study assumes that differences seen in trials can be generalised to the lifetime treatment period
Has a lifetime horizon been used for analysis (has a shorter horizon been justified)?	No	1-year time horizon used (not lifetime) ICERs are based on 1-year cost and QALY differences 5-year horizon in sensitivity analysis
Are the costs and consequences consistent with the perspective employed?[a]	Partial	Costs appear to be consistent with perspective employed, but limited justification provided, and may not include all relevant costs (e.g. primary care not included) Consequences limited to exacerbations and non-exacerbation months. Interpretation of non-exacerbation state from limited clinical evidence
Is differential timing considered?	No	1-year time frame used – no discounting. (in sensitivity analysis 3.5% discount rate used)
Is incremental analysis performed?	Yes	
Is sensitivity analysis undertaken and presented clearly?	Yes	Yes, sensitivity analysis is undertaken, probabilistic analysis

[a] More on data inputs for costs and consequences is given in the review of modelling methods (p. 74).

treatments. Both of these assumptions seem reasonable. However, treatment effect is based primarily on 12-week trial data, and the submission does not discuss the assumption that this treatment effect is assumed to continue for the period of the model (1 year in the base-case analysis), or the generalisability of the trial data to the broader treatment population.

Although not stated in the submission, assumptions are made regarding the toxicity profile for treatments, and longer term AEs (data commercial-in-confidence).

There is no statement in the submission on the evaluation of the internal consistency of the model.

TABLE 35 *NICE reference case requirements – AZ submission*

NICE reference case requirement		Reviewer comment
Decision problem: as per the scope developed by NICE (especially technologies and patient group)	Yes	
Comparator: alternative therapies routinely used in the UK NHS	Yes	
Perspective on costs: NHS and PSS	Yes	
Perspective on outcomes: all health effects on individuals	Partial	Health effects were limited to effect of treatment on exacerbation status/rate
Type of economic evaluation: CEA	Yes	
Synthesis of evidence on outcomes: based on a systematic review	Yes	
Measure of health benefits: QALYs	Yes	
Description of health states for QALY calculations: use of a standardised and validated generic instrument	Unclear	Method for estimating health state utilities is unclear
Method of preference elicitation for health state values: choice-based method (e.g. TTO, SG, not rating scale).	Partial	Method of preference elicitation is explicit, but a choice-based method was not used
Source of preference data: representative sample of the UK public	Yes	
Discount rate: 3.5% per year for costs and health effects	NA	Base case is 1-year analysis and therefore no discounting is necessary. Sensitivity analysis at 5 years, with 3.5% rate used for costs and effects

NA, not applicable; SG, standard gamble; TTO, time trade-off.

When interpreting the above points, it is also important to acknowledge that the literature on modelling cost-effectiveness in asthma treatment is indeed sparse, and although there are guidelines for the treatment of asthma (e.g. the BTS/SIGN Guideline), it is generally difficult (given the current evidence base) to develop and populate a model which is driven by such guidelines.

Data inputs

The primary data inputs for effectiveness, costs and outcomes are presented in the submission. Medication costs are based on trial data for the number of inhalations per day and drug costs from the Drug Tariff or eMIMs, and a weighted average cost per inhalation was estimated across the various drug formulations [mean inhalations per day for Symbicort FD (100/6), dose of 400/24 µg, was 3.86, same data for ICS (400 µg/day), and ICS + LABA (400 µg/24 µg/day)]. The 'base-case' mean cost per day applied for Symbicort FD was £1.06, with cost per day for Seretide (200 µg/100 µg), ICS alone (400 µg), and ICS + LABA (separate inhalers), presented (data commercial-in-confidence). Data on 'other costs' are presented clearly, and although including a number of assumptions, the methods used appear reasonable. The estimated cost for managing a mild exacerbation was £49.46. The estimated cost for the management of a severe exacerbation ranged between £333 and £1751 (depending on need for hospitalisation).

Although there may be some methodological limitations with the health state utility study (as with many studies of this nature) presented to inform the model, data on health state utilities are consistent with the preferred approach of NICE, and commercial-in-confidence data are provided in support. The general literature available to inform the health state values for asthma is sparse and undeveloped.

When considering methods for the calculation of transition probabilities, a small clinical evidence base has been used, and within the trial data used there are only a small number of reported events occurring (from a sample of $n = 565$). One of the two RCTs used to estimate transition probabilities is available in abstract form only.[225] Data presented indicate that in the trial populations there were a very small number of events requiring hospitalisations, OCSs or severe exacerbations (presumably hospitalisations) reported (data commercial-in-confidence; Appendix 6). Relative

treatment effect is estimated for the ICS-alone treatment comparison, from two RCTs (as above, one available as an abstract only). There is no assessment of relative treatment effect for Symbicort versus Seretide.

Assessment of uncertainty

Uncertainty is addressed in the submission using deterministic sensitivity analysis and PSA. PSA has addressed parameter uncertainty in a number of cases (number of inhalations, utility values, transition probabilities, RRs). However, although the choice of distributions would seem to follow accepted methods, in many cases the uncertainty around parameter inputs is very small, with SEs (around the mean) being very small (data commercial-in-confidence). The report (Appendix 6) refers to the use of probabilistic methods for transition probabilities. However, it is unclear how probabilities were sampled (whether they were either rescaled to sum to 1.00 or sampled via a correlation matrix) and the submission only reports that they were "normalised to give a sum of one" (p. 99).

The assessment of uncertainty does not address any issue of heterogeneity in the treatment group, and certain structural and methodological uncertainties are not addressed in the sensitivity analysis (e.g. impact of exacerbations on patients).

The deterministic analysis presented indicates very little difference in the summary status on cost-effectiveness comparisons; however, the variations in many of the parameter inputs are often very small.

Summary of general comments on the submission

- The focus on exacerbation (rate) and non-exacerbation defined control status may not capture other important aspects of asthma control and/or effectiveness data (e.g. broader symptoms, quality of life, lung function).
- The use of a limited evidence base for effectiveness to populate the model (the transition probabilities were derived from data from only two trials, in which the event rate was low, with one of the trials being reported in abstract form only).
- The relative treatment effect applied for the ICS alone comparator option was also based on the data from only two RCTs conducted in children, one including children aged 4–11 years and the other including children and adolescents aged 4–17 years. In addition, no relative treatment effect and no CEA for Symbicort versus Seretide was presented (due to lack of head-to-head data).
- Assumptions over the generalisability of the trial data and extrapolation of treatment effect are not discussed.
- The analysis contains a large amount of data that are classified as 'in confidence', some of which are not transparent in the submission.

Review of the submission by Meda Pharmaceuticals

Overview

The submission by Meda Pharmaceuticals to NICE includes evidence summaries of the Novolizer DPI device's technical performance, tolerability and acceptability to patients and also general discussion on the burden of asthma and the role of BUD in asthma treatment. The emphasis throughout their report, including in the CMA, is on the documented or estimated patient benefits and NHS savings of the Novolizer device compared with its main DPI competitor product, the Turbohaler. The majority of the submitted material, and the whole of the economic analysis, are therefore outside the scope of the NICE appraisal, which is focused on ICS drug compounds and selected 'add-on' therapies, rather than different formulations of the same compound and different delivery devices.

Nevertheless, the submission does provide further useful insight into the mediating role of inhaler devices in the effectiveness of ICS and other inhaled asthma medications.

For completeness, *Tables 36* and *37* outline the approach taken in the submission and provide an outline review.

Review of the submission by Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals

Overview

The submission by Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals to NICE focuses on clinical effectiveness and cost of Clenil Modulite, an HFA-propelled BDP product for use with pMDIs.

Clenil Modulite

The submission includes some discussion of the clinical equivalence of this product and the main CFC-propelled equivalent product that is licensed for use in children and the presentation of some price estimates. There is also some discussion on

TABLE 36 *Critical appraisal checklist of economic evaluation by Meda Pharmaceuticals*

Item	Critical appraisal	Reviewer comment
Is there a well-defined question?	No	Implicitly compare the two device types
Is there a clear description of alternatives?	Yes	Novolizer (BUD) vs Turbohaler (BUD) both at a dose of 400 μg daily (or 200 μg b.d.)
Has the correct patient group/population of interest been clearly stated?	Yes	Implicitly children from daily doses
Is the correct comparator used?	No	Comparison of devices not a part of NICE scope
Is the study type reasonable?	Yes – CMA	Assuming that claim of therapeutic equivalence with Turbohaler is valid
Is the perspective of the analysis clearly stated?	No	But implicitly NHS perspective
Is the perspective employed appropriate?	Yes	
Is effectiveness of the intervention established?	Yes (?)	Depending on the quality of RCT by Chuchalin *et al*. *Respiration* 2002;**69**:502–8.
Has a lifetime horizon been used for analysis (has a shorter horizon been justified)?	No	CMA projects 1 year costs
Are the costs consistent with the perspective employed?	Yes	Only drug provision costs are included
Are the consequences consistent with the perspective employed?	NA	
Is differential timing considered?	NA	
Is incremental analysis performed?	Yes	Calculates per person annual NHS savings of switching from Turbohaler to Novolizer
Is sensitivity analysis undertaken and presented clearly?	No	

NA, not applicable.

TABLE 37 *NICE reference case requirements – Meda Pharmaceuticals submission*

NICE reference case requirement		Reviewer comment
Decision problem: as per the scope developed by NICE (especially technologies and patient group)	No	Inhaler devices compared, (i.e. not BUD with other ICS or ICS + LABAs)
Comparator: alternative therapies routinely used in the UK NHS	Yes	But assessing inhaler devices outside NICE scope
Perspective on costs: NHS and PSS	Yes	Implicitly (source of costs = eMIMS)
Perspective on outcomes: all health effects on individuals	NA	CMA
Type of economic evaluation: cost-effectiveness analysis	CMA	
Synthesis of evidence on outcomes: based on a systematic review	Yes (?)	PubMed search obtained 1 trial; no stated inclusion or exclusion criteria
Measure of health benefits: QALYs	NA	CMA
Description of health states for QALY calculations: use of a standardised and validated generic instrument	NA	CMA
Method of preference elicitation for health state values: choice-based method (e.g. TTO, SG, not rating scale)	NA	CMA
Source of preference data: representative sample of the UK public	NA	CMA
Discount rate: 3.5% pa for costs and health effects	No	

NA, Not applicable.
[a] Health effects – just SFDs used to consider QALY values.
[b] Method for estimating health state utilities is unclear.

the changing regulatory environment for these and related products, specifically the progressive banning of CFC-propelled asthma medications under the Montreal Protocol.[226,227]

The submission is based on a systematic search of the literature on a range of topics that include clinical effectiveness, tolerability and safety and costs-effectiveness of the product. Appendix 9 of the submission provides information on this review. The literature is deemed unhelpful for the current submission, and the submission presents specific cost comparisons for selected products. For completeness, an outline review of the approach taken in the submission is presented.

Analysis of cost of Clenil Modulite (BDP)

Based on evidence summarised elsewhere in the submission (one published study, two unpublished Phase III studies) the cost-effectiveness section assumes the clinical equivalence of Clenil Modulite with Becotide, which is the main alternative BDP preparation for children that is for inhalation via pMDI devices. It then proceeds with a cost comparison between Clenil Modulite and the following three BDP products that are licensed for use in children in the UK:

- Becotide (= BDP, via CFC pMDI)
- Asmabec (= BDP, via Clickhaler DPI)
- Becodisks (= BDP, via Diskhaler DPI).

The submission uses a time horizon of 1 year and calculates the per patient incremental (NHS) medication costs of Clenil Modulite, Asmabec and Becodisks compared with Becotide, at both 100 µg twice daily and 200 µg twice daily (Tables 12 and 13 in the submission's Appendix).

Given regulatory changes towards the banning of CFC-propelled ICS, it is questionable whether the cost or cost-effectiveness of any products should now be compared with CFC-propelled products such as Becotide. More appropriate comparators would be products which combine other well-established ICS compounds (such as BUD or FP) that similarly use HFA propellants for use with pMDI devices.

Cost-effectiveness results

Table 38 summarises the annual incremental cost of the three comparator BDP preparations with Becotide.

Appraisal of the submitted cost-minimisation analysis

A critical appraisal checklist is given in *Table 39* and NICE reference case requirements in *Table 40*.

Summary of the cost-effectiveness submissions made by the manufacturers

Our review of the industry submissions highlights a number of concerns in relation to providing a comprehensive and reliable evidence base for considering the present decision problem.

None of the submissions compared the cost-effectiveness of all three of the ICS products licensed for use in children (and which are the scope for this assessment). All four submissions presented a CMA with a general assumption of an equivalent level of clinical effectiveness across ICS products being made. The submissions by Meda Pharmaceuticals and Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals were both limited to a presentation of the costs of their respective BDP products, Novolizer and Modulite, respectively. The submissions by GSK and AZ for the cost-effectiveness of ICS products were limited to a CMA. The cost-effectiveness of the products included in the current appraisal was not apparent. Moreover, the methods used for estimating the product costs varied across the submissions and were not transparent. This is particularly pertinent, as the majority of the different ICS named preparations are usually sold in a variety of dose strengths (e.g. 100, 200 or 400 µg per dose). Therefore, there are a number of ways of achieving any given daily dose of a

TABLE 38 *Annual incremental cost of the three comparator BDP preparations with Becotide*

Product	At 100 µg b.d.		At 200 µg b.d.	
	Annual cost (£)	Incremental cost (£)	Annual cost (£)	Incremental cost (£)
Becotide	10.18	–	29.71	–
Clenil Modulite	28.18	18.00	61.43	31.72
Asmabec	35.81	25.63	71.61	41.90
Becodisks	73.00	62.82	139.13	109.42

TABLE 39 *Critical appraisal checklist of economic evaluation by Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals*

Item	Critical appraisal	Reviewer comment
Is there a well-defined question?	No	But the implicit question is: which of the currently licensed non-CFC-propelled BDP products for use in children is the cheapest?
Is there a clear description of alternatives?	Yes	However, although equivalence is demonstrated with Becotide, the cost comparison includes two other BDP products that are delivered by DPI (Asmabec Clickhaler and Becodisk Diskhaler)
Has the correct patient group/population of interest been clearly stated?	No	Although implicitly their analysis applies to children aged under 12 years (or 6 years and over, which is the licence for some of the products compared)
Is the correct comparator used?	No	Both in terms of accordance with NICE scope and the fact that the proper comparator should probably be other ICS compounds delivered via pMDIs using HFA propellants
Is the study type reasonable?	Yes	
Is the perspective of the analysis clearly stated?	No	But implicitly NHS perspective (implied by source of unit costs)
Is the perspective employed appropriate?	Yes	
Is effectiveness of the intervention established?	Yes	Equivalence to Becotide, but not to the other two products included in the cost comparison
Has a lifetime horizon been used for analysis (has a shorter horizon been justified)?	No	CMA for 1 year
Are the costs consistent with the perspective employed?	Yes	
Are the consequences consistent with the perspective employed?	NA	
Is differential timing considered?	NA	
Is incremental analysis performed?	NA	
Is sensitivity analysis undertaken and presented clearly?	NA	

NA, not applicable.

particular drug, with the method used to derive the dose affecting cost.

For the combination therapies of Seretide (FP + S; GSK) and Symbicort (BUD + FF; AZ), more complex cost-effectiveness models were presented. However, once again both of the models were developed from a product-specific view of CEA. The model developed by GSK was presented as a 'generic' model, but the focus was entirely on Seretide, with no formal comparison being made with Symbicort. Conversely, the model developed by AZ was based only on trial data for Symbicort, and again no formal comparisons were made with Seretide. In both submissions the lack of direct head-to-head trial evidence between Seretide and Symbicort in children was highlighted.

Approach to modelling cost-effectiveness for this review

As discussed above, the review of the cost-effectiveness literature on asthma did not identify any studies that were applicable to the research questions of interest in the UK context. Similarly, the limitations of published models of asthma meant they were not applicable in the context of this review. We therefore developed our own model to address the specific research questions outlined previously, in the context of a UK

TABLE 40 *NICE reference case requirements – Trinity-Chiesi Pharmaceuticals*

NICE reference case requirement		Reviewer comment
Decision problem: as per the scope developed by NICE (especially technologies and patient group)	No	Product was compared with same ICS with different pMDI propellant (Becotide) and with same ICS for use with DPI devices (Asmabec Clickhaler and Becodisk Diskhaler). Therefore, it is outside the scope of the present appraisal
Comparator: alternative therapies routinely used in the UK NHS	Yes	(See above). However, Becotide will soon be obsolete due to implementation of Montreal Protocol, so rationale for this being the main comparator for cost-effectiveness purposes is questionable
Perspective on costs: NHS and PSS	Yes	
Perspective on outcomes: all health effects on individuals	No	CMA
Type of economic evaluation: CEA	CMA	
Synthesis of evidence on outcomes: based on a systematic review		Search criteria supplied
Measure of health benefits: QALYs	NA	CMA
Description of health states for QALY calculations: use of a standardised and validated generic instrument	NA	CMA
Method of preference elicitation for health state values: choice-based method (e.g. TTO, SG, not rating scale)	NA	CMA
Source of preference data: representative sample of the UK public	NA	CMA
Discount rate: 3.5% per year for costs and health effects	No	

NA, not applicable, SG, standard gamble; TTO, time trade-off.

paediatric population and of the BTS/SIGN Guideline.[1]

To use the model to estimate the relative cost-effectiveness of the three ICS drugs at low or high dose required an estimate of their relative treatment effects. Despite the number of trials identified, it was not possible to derive such an estimate, either from direct trial evidence of head-to-head comparisons of the three ICS, from meta-analyses combining the trial data or from synthesising the data using a mixed treatment comparison model. The trial data have been presented in the clinical effectiveness review and the reasons for this lack of an overall treatment effect are discussed in detail in the discussion below. Briefly, our inability to pool or compare treatment effects lies in the heterogeneous nature of the trials and lack of consistency in measuring and reporting outcomes, making comparison and combination extremely difficult.

For questions 1 and 2, as the clinical effectiveness review did not establish any consistent differences in treatment effect or safety parameters across the range of outcomes assessed within the trials at their accepted clinically equivalent doses, a cost comparison was undertaken (see the sections 'Review question 1 – effectiveness of low-dose ICS', p. 28, and 'Review question 2 – effectiveness of high-dose ICS', p. 35).

For question 3, no trials were identified that assessed the treatment strategy of either increasing the dose of ICS alone if control remained inadequate at doses within the Step 2 range of the Guideline, or the addition of a LABA to a lower dose of ICS in children.

As it is improbable from a clinical view point that the two treatment strategies would provide comparable benefits in terms of treatment effect and associated AEs, equivalence in outcomes between the two strategies could not be assumed. We were therefore unable to undertake a cost comparison for the costs associated with these two treatment strategies due to lack of relevant clinical trial evidence. An exploratory cost-offset analysis based on costs only was therefore undertaken for the higher dose ICS compared with each of the

available combination preparations in a dose ratio of 2:1 for the ICS dose delivered either alone or in combination. The assumption was made that this represented the most usual clinical decision facing clinicians when considering options for treating children whose asthma is inadequately controlled on low-dose ICS alone.

For the comparison of both combination inhalers with the same drugs delivered in separate inhalers, clinical equivalence between the treatment strategies could be assumed from the results of the clinical effectiveness analysis. A cost comparison was therefore undertaken and is presented in the section 'Cost comparison analysis results' (p. 84).

For question 5, no trials were identified that compared the effectiveness of a combination inhaler containing BUD/FF with a combination inhaler containing FP/SAL in children. Due to the lack of evidence on the relative cost-effectiveness of using either combination inhaler, a cost comparison was undertaken. This was deemed appropriate due to the lack of evidence of non-equivalence between the two comparators. The methods employed and results of the cost comparison are presented in the next section.

Methods for cost comparison

Rationale

Cost comparison analysis should normally be used when there is valid and reliable evidence of equivalent effectiveness of the alternative technologies being compared.[219] However, as previous sections of this report have concluded, among different ICS for asthma there is little conclusive evidence of equivalence, and more often instead, inconclusive evidence concerning differential effectiveness. Furthermore, the evidence of differential effectiveness due to adding a LABA to treatment with ICS is also ambiguous, and largely restricted to studies in adults.

However, performing a cost comparison analysis is not straightforward, as it is far from simple to derive a single 'representative' cost figure for each ICS. This is because each drug is typically available in a range of named preparations (e.g. from different manufacturers or for different inhaler devices), and also because each named preparation is usually sold in a variety of dose strengths (e.g. 100, 200 or 400 µg per dose). There can therefore be a wide variety of ways of achieving any given daily dose of a particular drug. This is especially an issue for long-established drugs such as BDP and BUD.

In order to generate single cost figures for each drug, we have made use of standard assumed ratios regarding dose equivalence and made some other simplifying assumptions to allow pooling of cost estimates. Also, given the likely withdrawal of CFC-containing products in the near future, we have also calculated cost estimates both including and excluding currently available CFC-containing products (this is an issue for BDP and BUD preparations only). During the period when CFC-containing products are withdrawn from sale in the UK, it is likely that the relative market shares of different named preparations will also alter, because many patients will need to switch between products, new products may simultaneously enter the market and pack prices may also change.

Given the issues outlined above, what we present below should be viewed as an exploration of the current and future relative costs of different classes of ICS and combination products.

Methods

First, we have calculated the mean annual per patient cost of taking each specific named preparation of each drug (or each combination of drugs), in order to achieve a given level of daily dosage. For each named preparation, this is calculated as:

£ per dose × doses per day × No. days in year = (BNF £ pack price ÷ doses per pack) × (target daily dose ÷ µg BDP–CFC equivalent per dose) × 365

where 'BNF £ pack price' is the specific BNF per pack price for a specific preparation (e.g. 50, 100 or 200 µg per dose). The 'doses per day' are the number of doses of a given preparation needed to achieve a particular target daily dose level (e.g. 400 µg/day of BDP–CFC equivalent ICS; see below).

Assumptions about target daily dosage

For child patients with asthma, we have estimated costs for two 'low levels' and one 'high level' of daily dosage of ICS. The low-level dosages we have costed are:

LD_{start}: low-dose starting dosage = 200 µg CFC–BDP (or equivalent) per day
LD_{max}: low-dose maximum dosage = 400 µg CFC–BDP (or equivalent) per day

These equate to, respectively, the recommended starting dose for child patients stepping up from mild intermittent asthma managed primarily by SABAs (i.e. those changing from Step 1 to Step 2 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline) and the recommended maximum daily dose of ICS for children before an add-on therapy (such as a LABA) should be tried (i.e. Step 3, 'Add-on therapy').

The 'high-level' daily dosage we have costed is 800 µg BDP–CFC (or equivalent) per day. This is assumed to approximate to the median ICS dose of people being treated at Step 4 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline.

Assumptions about number of doses per day/dose of preparations

For simplicity, and unless recommended otherwise in the BNF, we assumed that the required daily dose of an ICS was achieved as either one dose taken twice daily or two doses twice daily. These base-case assumptions are summarised in *Table 41*.

Assumptions about dose equivalence with CFC–BDP

In order to compare the cost of alternative ICS preparations, it is necessary to make some assumptions about the likely equivalent dose that would be required if controlled patients were switching between preparations. Because of product 'potency' characteristics, related to particle size and mode of action, the same quantities of different active ingredients achieve different clinical effectiveness. For the practical purposes of informing dosage decisions when switching patients between ICS products, both the GINA Guidelines and the BTS/SIGN Guideline have published ratios of dose equivalence. These are shown in *Table 42*.

It should be noted that these effectiveness equivalence ratios are fairly crude 'rules of thumb', for the main purpose of aiding doctors in deciding the starting dose of any new ICS drug when switching between drug types. They may not necessarily, therefore, reflect the relative doses actually used in the body of trials that have examined the clinical effectiveness of the different ICS drugs. Nor would they be likely to reflect possible differences in *de facto* effectiveness within and between drugs due to different concordance or ease of use associated with different inhaler devices. In any case, it should be remembered that after a switch between drug treatments, clinical guidelines recommend that the dose be adjusted upwards or downwards until the minimum dose required to maintain effective control is found.

However, to perform a cost comparison analysis we have to make use of these assumptions about how much of alternative ICS preparation people would probably need to take in order to maintain the same level of symptom control.

TABLE 41 *Daily patterns of ICS dose-taking to achieve target daily dose*

Daily dosage (BDP–CFC equivalent) (µg)	Taken either as	Or as
200	50 µg[a] × 4 doses	100 µg[a] × 2 doses
400	100 µg[a] × 4 doses	200 µg[a] × 2 doses
800	200 µg[a] × 4 doses	400 µg[a] × 2 doses

[a] BDP–CFC or equivalent (see multipliers in *Table 42*).

TABLE 42 *Published and assumed dose equivalence ratios of different ICS preparations*

Drug	Equivalent amount of BDP–CFC		Ratio used in CMA
	BTS/SIGN Guidelines	GINA Pocket Guide to Asthma	
BDP HFA-propelled[a]	×2	×2	×2
BUD	~ ×1	Not shown	×1
BUD–DPI	~ ×1[b]	~ ×1	×1
FP	×2	×2	×2

Sources: Section 4.2.3 of BTS/SIGN Guideline and Figure 7 (p. 19) of the GINA Pocket Guide 2005.
[a] Except Clenil Modulite, which has been designed to have equivalent potency to BDP–CFC preparations.
[b] Despite some evidence that BUD–DPI via Turbohaler is more effective than same dose of BDP–CFC.

Assumptions about the mix of brands/named preparations within each ICS drug class

For some of the ICS drug (notably BDP), there is a wide range of named preparations, available in different physical forms (aerosol versus dry powder), for different inhaler devices, and either propelled by CFC-containing or non-CFC-containing propellants (e.g. HFA preparations). To compare between ICS drugs, it is therefore necessary to generate a single, average cost for a given level of daily dosage.

We have used two methods for doing this: (1) using an unweighted mean annual cost and (2) using a weighted mean annual cost, weighted according to the current (2005) market share in terms of quantity of doses sold (in BDP–CFC equivalent units).

The unweighted mean annual cost is calculated as follows. First, for a given dose level (e.g. LD_{start} = 200 µg BDP–CFC equivalent), calculate the annual cost of achieving this daily dosage (e.g. all products available as 50 µg BDP–CFC equivalent doses and/or 100 µg BDP–CFC equivalent doses). Second, sum the annual costs for these preparations. Third, divide by the number of preparations available at these doses (i.e. the number of annual costs summed in step two).

The weighted mean annual cost is calculated as follows. First, the adjusted annual quantity sold of each product for each drug is calculated. For a product sold in 200-dose packs, in a drug where most products are available in 200-dose packs, this will simply be the quantity of packs sold (in thousands, as listed in the Prescribing Cost Analysis (PCA) database for 2005). However, for a product of this drug sold in a 100-dose pack, this PCA quantity sold will be multiplied by 0.5 (= 100/200); similarly, for any products sold in 120-dose packs, the PCA quantity sold will be multiplied by 0.6 (= 120/200).

Second, using these adjusted sale quantities, total quantities are summed for each drug. For each drug, total quantities are also calculated for three groupings of products: CFC-propelled aerosols (pMDI–CFC), HFA-propelled aerosols (pMDI–HFA) and products for DPIs. These total quantities are used as the denominators for the weighted mean percentages and to calculate the proportion of adjusted sales of each subgroup of products (e.g. pMDI–HFA only, DPI only) accounted for by each product.

This has allowed the calculation of several different (weighted and unweighted) mean annual costs by broad inhaler type, and also according to whether the product contains a CFC propellant or not. This is particularly critical for estimating the mean annual cost of BDP and BUD, since CFC-containing products account for a substantial market share of these drugs. However, these products will probably be withdrawn from the market in the near future.

For each of the three ICS drugs that are licensed for use in children, and for each of the three dose levels, we have therefore estimated both a weighted and an unweighted mean annual cost of:

- all relevant CFC-propelled (pMDI) products (where they exist)
- all relevant HFA-propelled (pMDI) products (where they exist)
- all relevant dry powder (capsule and loose powder) products
- all relevant products for the ICS (including CFC-propelled products)
- all relevant products for the ICS (excluding CFC-propelled products).

By 'relevant' products we mean those that achieve the specified daily dose in two or four doses per day.

Note that because the combination inhaler products are only available in two named preparations (Symbicort and Seretide), and only the lowest dose strength of each product is recommended in children, we have simply calculated the cost for each low-dose product.

Cost comparison analysis results

Research question 1: what is the cheapest ICS at Step 2?

The cost comparison results presented below are justified on the basis that **we found no consistent evidence of differential effectiveness in trials comparing the three comparators of interest** (see the section 'Summary of Q1: relative effectiveness of low-dose ICS', p. 35).

Tables 43 and *44* summarise the unweighted and weighted mean annual cost of taking the three main ICS drug classes, by inhaler and propellant type, at the **typical starting daily dose** for children of 200 µg BDP–CFC (equivalent) per day. *Figures 8* and *9* then summarise some of these data, together with data on the cheapest and most expensive drug in each ICS drug class for achieving these target daily dosage.

TABLE 43 *Unweighted mean annual cost of ICS by drug if on 200 μg BDP equivalent per day*

Drug	Preparations with same inhaler and propellant type (2006 £)			All preparations in drug class (2006 £)	
	pMDI with CFC	pMDI with HFA	DPI	Including CFC-propelled	Excluding CFC-propelled
BDP	26	28	48	32	42
BUD	54	NA	68	61	68
FP	NA	33	85	68	68

NA, not applicable.

TABLE 44 *Weighted mean annual cost of ICS by drug if on 200 μg BDP equivalent per day*

Drug	Preparations with same inhaler and propellant type (2006 £)			All preparations in drug class (2006 £)	
	pMDI with CFC	pMDI with HFA	DPI	Including CFC-propelled	Excluding CFC-propelled
BDP	28	NA[a]	60	30	60
BUD	54	NA	68	64	68
FP	NA	33	85	44	44

NA, not applicable.
[a] There is currently only one pMDI with HFA product recommended for use in children (Clenil Modulite); its current market share is not known.

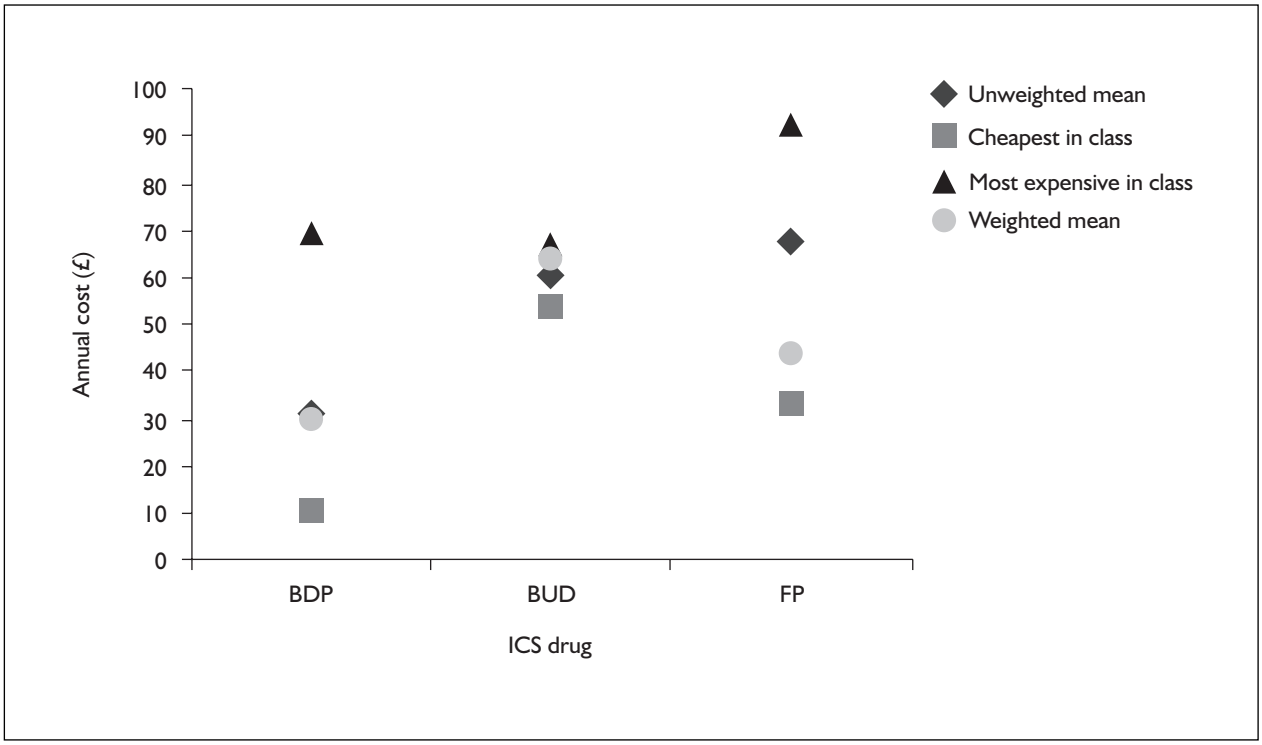

FIGURE 8 *Annual cost of 200 μg ICS per day by drug class, and including all products. Cheapest in class products: BDP = Becotide 100 μg (200 D); BUD = Pulmicort L.S. 50 μg (200 D); FP = Flixotide Evohaler 50 μg (120 D). Most expensive in class products: BDP = Becodisks Disk 100 μg (120 D Ref.); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 100 μg (200 D); FP = Flixotide Disk 50 μg (60 D Ref.). D = number of doses in pack; Ref. = refill pack price (where the same preparation is also available with inhaler device included).*

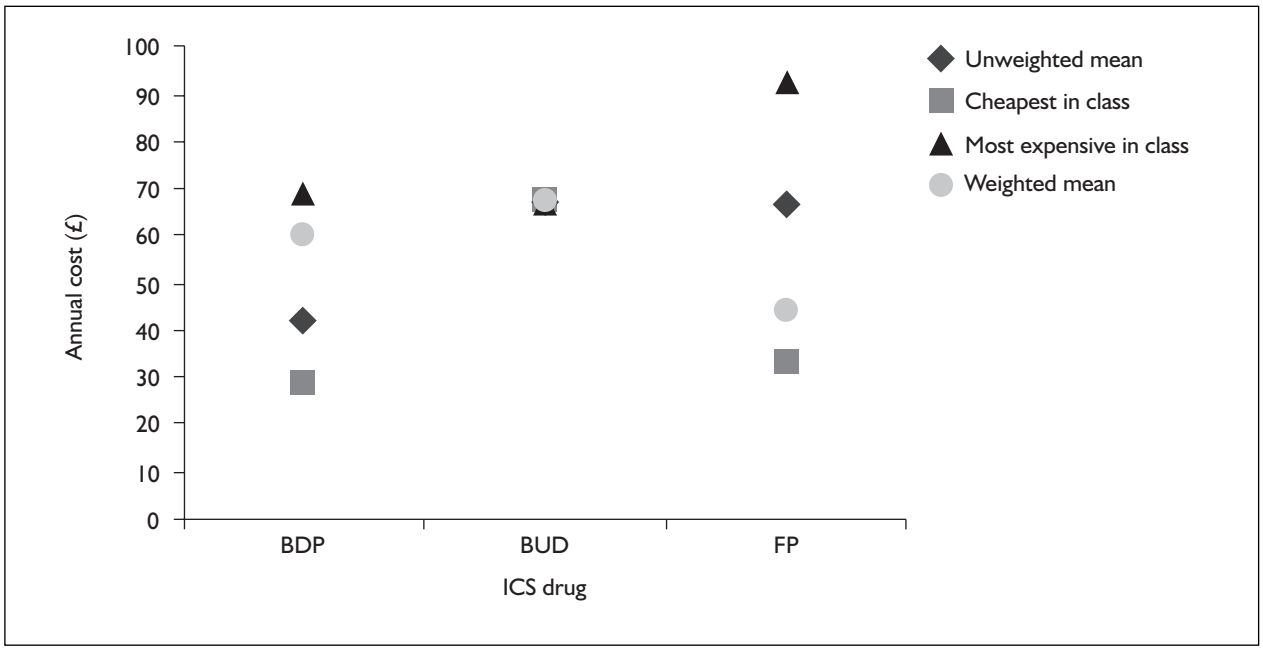

FIGURE 9 *Annual cost of 200 µg ICS per day by drug class, and excluding CFC-propelled products. Cheapest in class products: BDP = Clenil Modulite 50 µg (200 D); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 100 µg (200 D); FP = Flixotide Evohaler 50 µg (120 D). Most expensive in class products: BDP = Becodisks Disk 100 µg (120 D Ref.); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 100 µg 200; FP = Flixotide Disk 50 µg (60 D Ref.). D, Ref.:* see Figure 8.

They show that overall BDP appears to be the current cheapest class of ICS drug at starting low doses for children (200 µg BDP–CFC equivalent per day), costing on average £30 per year (weighted mean) or £32 per year (unweighted mean). If CFC-propelled products are excluded from the available products, BDP is still the cheapest but at a higher annual cost. Excluding CFC-propelled products, and using current prices, cause a significant increase in the mean annual cost of taking BDP at this dose level since CFC-propelled products still account for over half of the product types and quantities of BDP sold. In contrast for FP, no currently available products are CFC propelled, so their exclusion does not alter the calculated mean annual cost. BUD is the most expensive of the class of drug when weighted means are considered. When CFC-propelled products are excluded, FP is significantly cheaper (weighted means) than either BDP or BUD; this is because there is a relatively cheap HFA-propelled preparation of FP (Flixotide Evohaler 50 µg, £5.44 for 120-dose pack = £33 per year), which accounts for a large proportion (79% of 50-µg FP doses) of current sales of the three 50-µg FP products available to children.

Tables 45 and *46* summarise the unweighted and weighted mean annual cost of taking the three main ICS drug classes, by inhaler and propellant type, at the **typical maximum daily dose** for children of 400 µg BDP–CFC (equivalent) per day. *Figures 10* and *11* then summarise some of these data, together with data on the cheapest and most expensive drug in each ICS drug class for achieving this target daily dosage.

They show that, overall at this dose level, BDP appears to be the current cheapest class of ICS drug, costing on average £63 per year (weighted mean) or £68 per year (unweighted mean). If CFC-propelled products are excluded from the available products, BDP is still the cheapest according to both the unweighted and unweighted means. Excluding CFC-propelled products, and using current prices, cause a substantial increase in the weighted mean annual cost of taking BDP at this dose level, since typically cheaper CFC propelled products still account for over half of the product types and quantities of BDP sold. In contrast for FP, no currently available products are CFC propelled, so their exclusion does not alter the calculated mean annual cost. Overall, under most assumptions, FP products are the most expensive drug class (weighted/unweighted means when including CFC-propelled products), except that they are similar in cost to CFC-free BUD products. In fact, if only non-CFC-propelled products are considered, the weighted mean annual cost of the three ICS drug classes varies between only £122 and £133.

TABLE 45 *Unweighted mean annual cost of ICS by drug if on 400 μg BDP equivalent per day*

Drug	Preparations with same inhaler and propellant type (2006 £)			All preparations in drug class (2006 £)	
	pMDI with CFC	pMDI with HFA	DPI	Including CFC-propelled	Excluding CFC-propelled
BDP	47	56	98	68	92
BUD	76	NA	113	106	113
FP	NA	NA	128	128	128

NA, not applicable.

TABLE 46 *Weighted mean annual cost of ICS by drug if on 400 μg BDP equivalent per day*

Drug	Preparations with same inhaler and propellant type (2006 £)			All preparations in drug class (2006 £)	
	pMDI with CFC	pMDI with HFA	DPI	Including CFC-propelled	Excluding CFC-propelled
BDP	51	NA[a]	122	63	122
BUD	76	NA	134	120	134
FP	NA	NA	133	133	133

NA, not applicable.
[a] There is currently only one pMDI with HFA product recommended for use in children (Clenil Modulite); its current market share is not known.

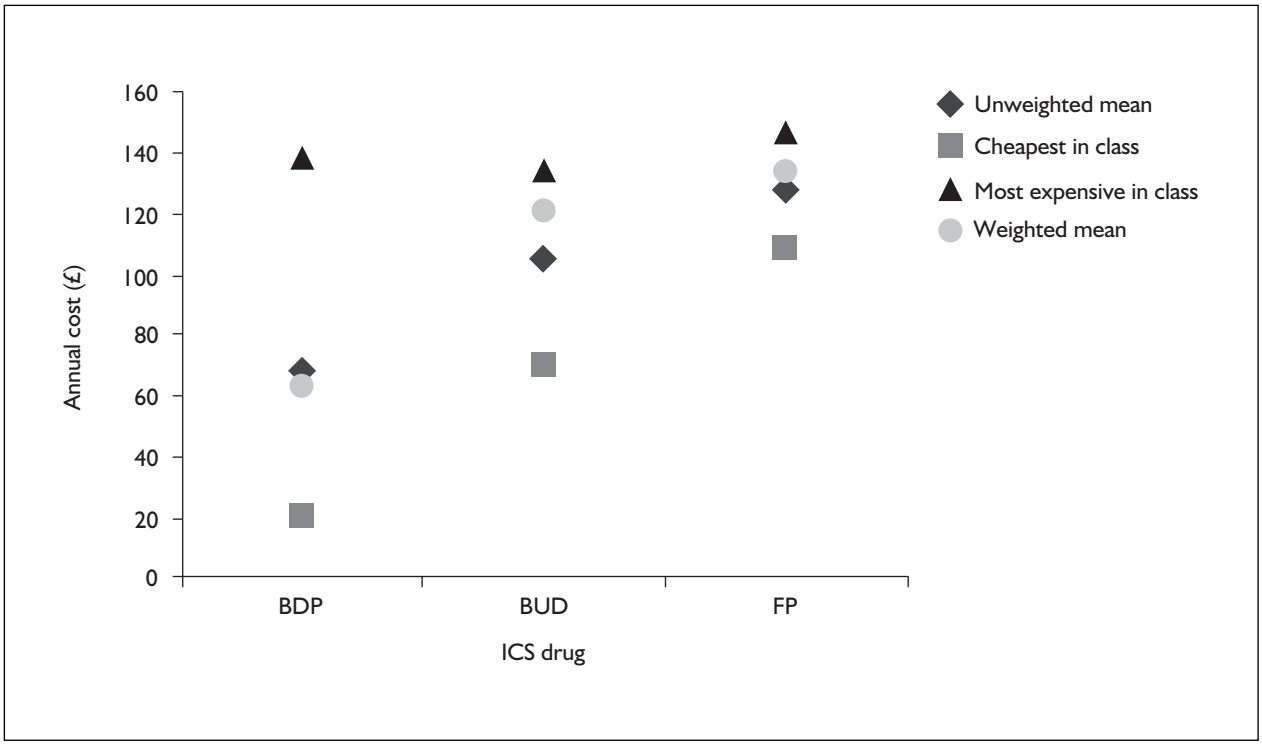

FIGURE 10 *Annual cost of 400 μg ICS per day by drug class and including all products. Cheapest in class products: BDP = Becotide 100 μg (200 D); BUD = Novolizer 200 μg (100 D Ref.); FP = Flixotide Accuhaler 100 μg (60 D with device). Most expensive in class products: BDP = Becodisks Disk 100 μg (120 D Ref.); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 100 μg (200 D); FP = Flixotide Disk 100 μg 60 D Ref.). D, Ref.:* see Figure 8.

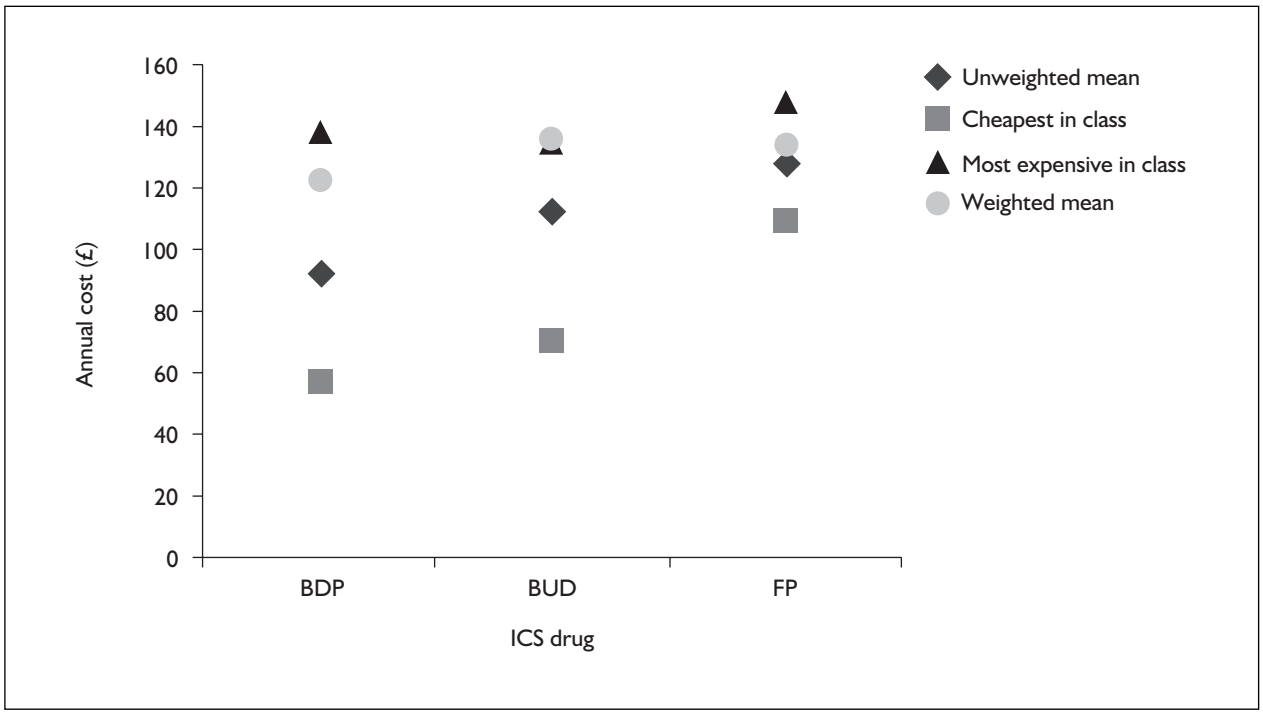

FIGURE 11 *Annual cost of 400 μg ICS per day by drug class excluding CFC-propelled products. Cheapest in class products: BDP = Clenil Modulite 100 μg (200 D); BUD = Novolizer 200 μg (100 D Ref.); FP = Flixotide Accuhaler 100 μg (60 D with device). Most expensive in class products: BDP = Becodisks Disk 100 μg (120 D Ref.); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 100 μg (200 D); FP = Flixotide Disk 100 μg (60 D Ref.). D, Ref.: see* Figure 8.

Research question 2: what is the cheapest ICS at Step 4?

The cost comparison results presented below are justified on the basis that **we found no consistent evidence of differential effectiveness in trials comparing the five comparators of interest at this dose level** (see the section 'Summary of Q2: relative effectiveness of high-dose ICS', p. 48).

For this question, we have assumed that for children a maximum daily dose of ICS when at treatment Step 4 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline is 800 μg BDP–CFC equivalent. Since the new BDP product Clenil Modulite is listed in the BNF under standard-dose inhalers, we have assumed that this product is not currently recommended for use in children at these high doses.

Tables 47 and *48* summarise the unweighted and weighted mean annual cost of taking the three main ICS drug classes for children, by inhaler and propellant type, at the **typical maximum daily** dose for children of 800 μg BDP–CFC (equivalent) per day. *Figures 12* and *13* then summarise some of these data, together with data on the cheapest and most expensive drug in each ICS drug class for achieving this target daily dosage.

They show that, overall at this dose level, BDP appears to be the current cheapest class of ICS drug, costing on average £142 per year (weighted mean) or £143 per year (weighted mean). If CFC-propelled products are excluded from the available products, BDP is still the cheapest according to both the weighted and unweighted means. Excluding CFC-propelled products, and using current prices, cause a substantial increase in the weighted mean annual cost of taking BDP at this dose level, since the cheaper CFC-propelled products still account for over half of the product types and quantities of BDP sold (for children and adults). In contrast for FP, no currently available products are CFC propelled, so their exclusion does not alter the calculated mean annual cost. Overall, under most assumptions, FP products are currently the most expensive drug class (weighted/unweighted means when including CFC-propelled products). However, FP products are similar in cost to CFC-free BUD products when weighted according to current market share. If only non-CFC-propelled products are considered, the weighted mean annual cost of the three ICS drug classes varies between only £247 and £266.

TABLE 47 *Unweighted mean annual cost of ICS by drug if on 800 μg BDP equivalent per day*

Drug	Preparations with same inhaler and propellant type (2006 £)			All preparations in drug class (2006 £)	
	pMDI with CFC	pMDI with HFA	DPI	Including CFC-propelled	Excluding CFC-propelled
BDP	59	NA	199	143	199
BUD	153	NA	212	197	212
FP	NA	NA	257	257	257

NA, not applicable.

TABLE 48 *Weighted mean annual cost of ICS by drug if on 800 μg BDP equivalent per day*

Drug	Preparations with same inhaler and propellant type (2006 £)			All preparations in drug class (2006 £)	
	pMDI with CFC	pMDI with HFA	DPI	Including CFC-propelled	Excluding CFC-propelled
BDP	59	NA[a]	247	142	247
BUD	153	NA	269	216	269
FP	NA	NA	266	266	266

NA, not applicable.
[a] There is currently only one pMDI with HFA product recommended for use in children (Clenil Modulite); its current market share is not known.

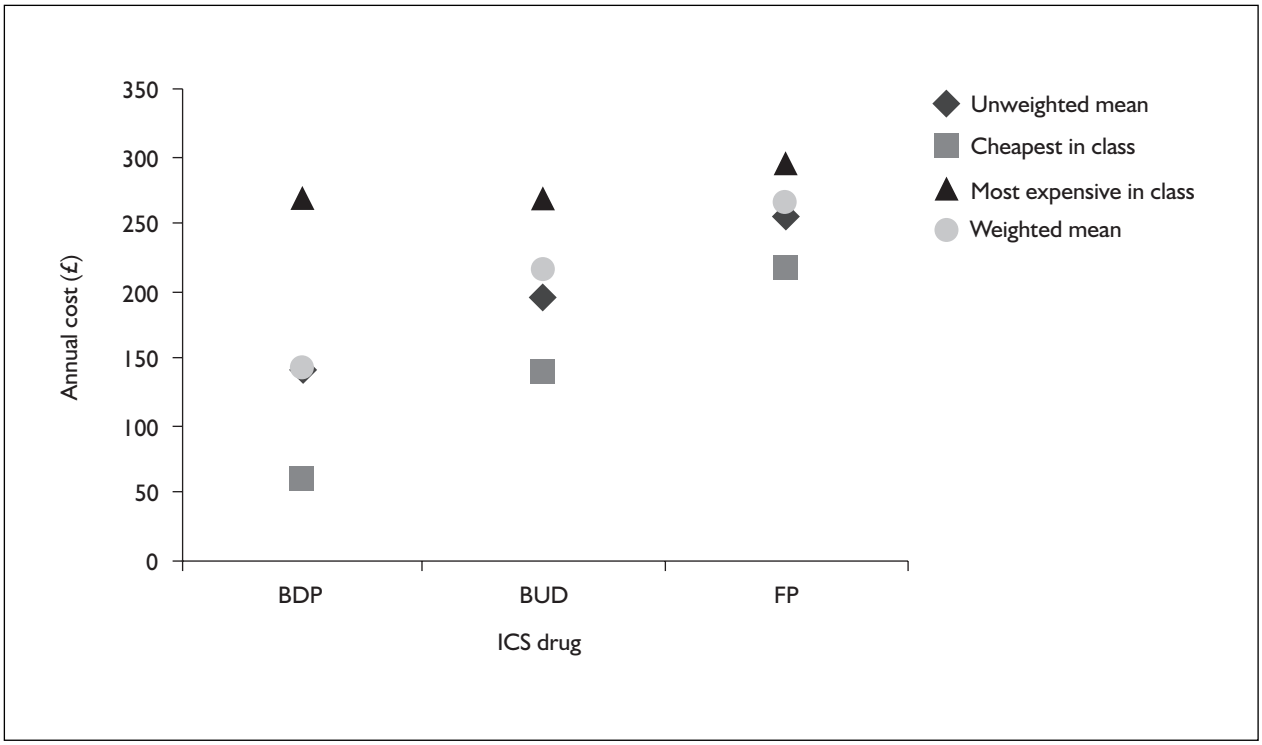

FIGURE 12 *Annual cost of 800 μg ICS per day by drug class and including all products. Cheapest in class products: BDP = Beclazone 200 μg (200 D); BUD = Novolizer 200 μg (100 D Ref.); FP = Flixotide Accuhaler 100 μg (60 D with device). Most expensive in class products: BDP = Becodisks Disk 200 μg (120 D Ref.); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 200 μg (100 D); FP = Flixotide Disk 100 μg 60 D Ref.). D, Ref.:* see Figure 8.

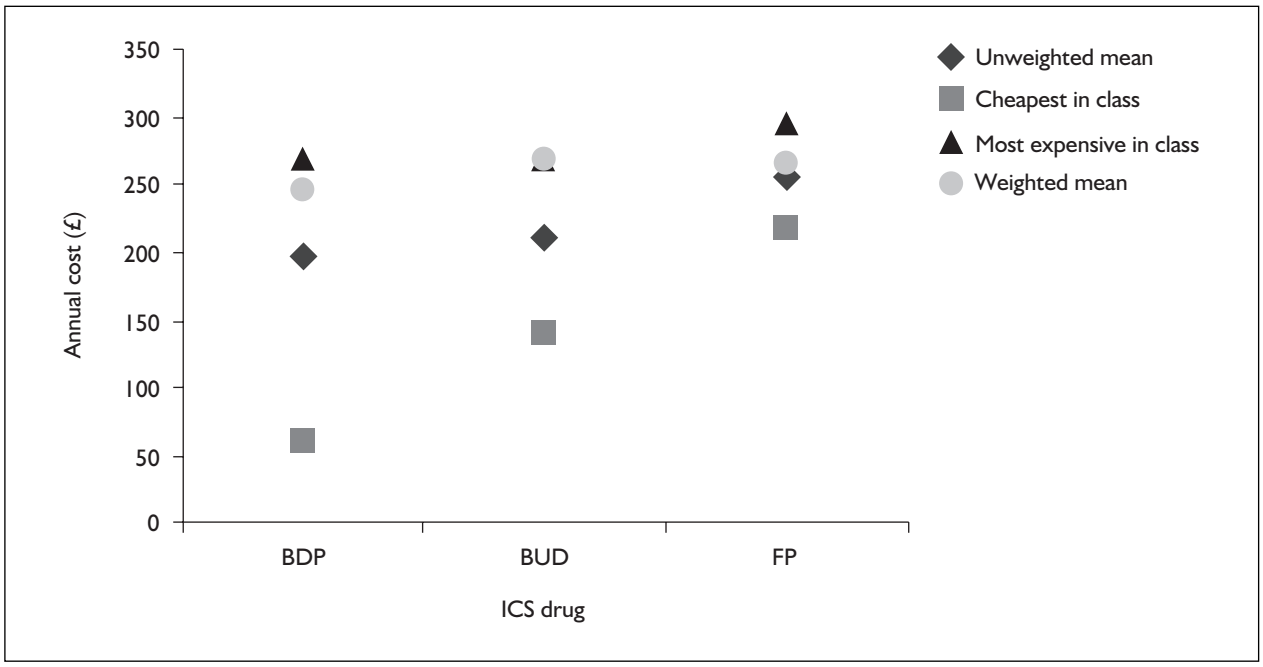

FIGURE 13 *Annual cost of 800 µg ICS per day by drug class excluding CFC-propelled products. Cheapest in class products: BDP = Beclomet Dipropionate 200 µg (200 D); BUD = Novolizer 200 µg (100 D Ref.); FP = Flixotide Accuhaler 100 µg (60 D with device). Most expensive in class products: BDP = Becodisks Disk 200 µg (120 D Ref.); BUD = Pulmicort Turbohaler 200 µg (100 D); FP = Flixotide Disk 100 µg 60 D Ref.). D, Ref.:* see Figure 8.

Research question 3: increase ICS dose or add LABA to a lower ICS dose?

We have not performed a cost comparison analysis of this research question because **we found no reliable evidence that would enable us to conclude, or reasonably assume, equivalence between ICS and ICS plus a LABA** (see the section 'Review question 3a – ICS/LABA or higher dose ICS', p. 48). Therefore, below we set out the costs and cost differences between products and present the results of a speculative threshold analysis to examine the number of exacerbations that would need to be avoided for the more expensive product to achieve NHS cost savings.

Exploratory cost savings analysis of combination inhalers versus ICS monotherapy

Given the lack of any evidence on the relative effectiveness of combination inhalers compared with an increased dose ICS, but also the known differences in costs between different products, it is possible to calculate some threshold levels of effectiveness – in terms of exacerbations avoided – that would need to be achieved for the more expensive product to achieve NHS cost savings. These are based on an estimated mean cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation of £1056 (assumed range £500–2000) or the estimated cost of a GP-managed exacerbation of £24 (assumed range £20–40). (The estimation of these costs is shown in *Tables 53* and *54*, p. 95.) In general, therefore, averting one hospital-managed exacerbation is much more likely to generate cost savings than averting a GP-managed exacerbation.

The calculations for these exploratory analyses are shown in *Tables 49–52*. *Tables 49* and *50* compare the cost of Seretide and Symbicort products with the weighted mean cost of an increased dose of each type of ICS drug. *Tables 51* and *52* compare the cost of Seretide and Symbicort products with an increased dose of the cheapest product for each ICS drug. Where the annual cost of either Seretide or Symbicor exceeds the cost of the increased dose ICS, we have calculated the annual number of either hospital-managed exacerbations or the annual number of GP-managed exacerbations that would have to be averted in order to compensate for the additional costs of the combination preventer medication.

Only the combination inhaler, Seretide Evohaler (100 µg/50 µg FP/SAL per day) is slightly cheaper than the weighted mean cost of all types of ICS at increased dose except BDP 400 µg/day (including CFC-propelled products). Compared with BDP–CFC products at 400 µg/day, taking Seretide Evohaler costs £52 extra per year. If the cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation lies somewhere

TABLE 49 *Exploratory cost-savings analysis: annual exacerbations avoided to cover extra cost of FP/SAL compared with weighted mean cost of ICS*

	Weighted mean annual cost of ICS (£)	Seretide Evohaler 100 μg/50 μg FP/SAL per day	Cost difference per year (£)	Cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation (£)			Cost of a GP-managed exacerbation (£)		
				500	1056	2000	20	24	40
BDP 400/day	63	115	52	0.1	0.05	0.03	2.6	2.2	1.3
BUD 400/day	120	115	– 5	Seretide Evohaler cheaper than higher dose ICS					
FP 200/day (all CFC-free)	133	115	–15	Seretide Evohaler cheaper than higher dose ICS					
BDP 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	122	115	– 7	Seretide Evohaler cheaper than higher dose ICS					
BUD 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	134	115	–19	Seretide Evohaler cheaper than higher dose ICS					
		Seretide Accuhaler 100 μg/50 μg FP/SAL per day							
BDP 400/day	63	190	127	0.25	0.12	0.06	6.35	5.29	3.18
BUD 400/day	120	190	70	0.14	0.07	0.04	3.50	2.92	1.75
FP 200/day (all CFC-free)	133	190	57	0.11	0.05	0.03	2.85	2.38	1.43
BDP 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	122	190	68	0.14	0.06	0.03	3.40	2.83	1.70
BUD 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	134	190	56	0.11	0.05	0.03	2.80	2.33	1.40

TABLE 50 *Exploratory cost-savings analysis: annual exacerbations avoided to cover extra cost of BUD/FF compared with weighted mean cost of ICS*

	Weighted mean annual cost of ICS (£)	Seretide Turbohaler 200 μg/12 μg BUD/FF per day (100 μg/6 μg inhaler) (£)[a]	Cost difference per year (£)	Cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation (£)			Cost of a GP-managed exacerbation (£)		
				500	1056	2000	20	24	40
BDP 400/day	63	201	138	0.28	0.13	0.07	6.90	5.75	3.45
BUD 400/day	120	201	81	0.16	0.08	0.04	4.05	3.38	2.03
FP 200/day (all CFC-free)	133	201	68	0.14	0.06	0.03	3.40	2.83	1.70
BDP 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	122	201	79	0.16	0.07	0.04	3.95	3.29	1.98
BUD 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	134	201	67	0.13	0.06	0.03	3.35	2.79	1.68

[a] Costs for Symbicort Turbohaler are based on the inhaler 100 μg/6 μg. Symbicort 200 μg/6 μg and 400 μg/12 μg are not recommended in children aged under 12 years.

TABLE 51 *Exploratory cost-savings analysis: annual exacerbations avoided to cover extra cost of FP/SAL compared with cheapest ICS product for each drug*

	Annual cost of cheapest ICS (£)	Seretide Evohaler 100 μg/50 μg FP/SAL per day	Cost difference per year (£)	Cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation (£)			Cost of a GP-managed exacerbation (£)		
				500	1056	2000	20	24	40
BDP 400/day	20	115	95	0.19	0.09	0.05	4.75	3.96	2.38
BUD 400/day (all CFC-free)	70	115	45	0.09	0.05	0.02	2.22	1.88	1.13
FP 200/day (all CFC-free)	109	115	6	0.01	0.005	0.003	0.30	0.25	0.15
BDP 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	56	115	59	0.12	0.06	0.03	2.95	2.46	1.48
		Seretide Accuhaler 100 μg/50 μg FP/SAL per day							
BDP 400/day	20	190	170	0.34	0.16	0.09	8.50	7.08	4.25
BUD 400/day (all CFC-free)	70	190	120	0.24	0.11	0.06	6.00	5.00	3.00
FP 200/day (all CFC-free)	109	190	81	0.16	0.08	0.04	4.05	3.38	2.03
BDP 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	56	190	134	0.27	0.13	0.07	6.70	5.58	3.35

TABLE 52 *Exploratory cost-savings analysis: annual exacerbations avoided to cover extra cost of BUD/FF compared with cheapest ICS product for each drug*

	Annual cost of cheapest ICS (£)	Seretide Turbohaler 200 μg/12 μg BUD/FF per day (£)[a]	Cost difference per year (£)	Cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation (£)			Cost of a GP-managed exacerbation (£)		
				500	1056	2000	20	24	40
BDP 400/day	20	201	181	0.36	0.17	0.09	9.05	7.54	4.53
BUD 400/day (all CFC-free)	70	201	131	0.26	0.12	0.07	6.55	5.46	3.28
FP 200/day (all CFC-free)	109	201	92	0.18	0.09	0.05	4.60	3.83	2.30
BDP 400/day (excluding CFC-propelled)	56	201	145	0.29	0.14	0.07	7.25	6.04	3.63

[a] Costs for Symbicort Turbohaler are based on the inhaler 100 μg/6 μg. Symbicort 200 μg/6 μg and 400 μg/12 μg are not recommended in children aged under 12 years.

between £500 and £2000, then in order to be cost saving Seretide Evohaler would need to avert at least one hospital-managed exacerbation in between 10 and 39 people who are using these inhalers compared with BDP. However, treatment with this specific combination inhaler would annually need to avert between 1.3 and 2.6 GP-managed exacerbations per person to cover the extra drug treatment costs.

Both of the combination inhalers, Seretide Accuhaler and Symbicort Turbohaler, are more expensive than the weighted mean annual cost for all types of ICS at a two-fold increased dose.

Compared with the lowest cost preparation for each ICS drug, the combination inhalers are always more expensive than these ICS products at increased dose. The greatest cost difference is between taking Symbicort Turbohaler (200 µg/12 µg/day = £201 per year) and BDP 400 µg/day (as Becotide 100 µg = £20 per year). To compensate for these extra annual medication costs, the combination inhaler would annually need to avert at least one hospital-managed exacerbation in between 3 and 11 people taking the drug. In contrast, between 4.5 and 9 GP-managed exacerbations per person would need to be averted annually to compensate for the extra cost of taking this combination inhaler, compared with increasing the dose of Becotide to 400 µg/day.

However, since Becotide and other CFC-propelled products will soon be withdrawn from sale in the UK, it is now probably more realistic to compare the cost of the combination inhalers with CFC-free ICS products. Compared with the cheapest CFC-free products of each ICS drug, the combination inhalers are between £6 and £145 more costly per year (see *Tables 51* and *52*). With a £6 extra annual cost of Seretide Evohaler 100 µg/50 µg/day over FP 200 µg/day, only a GP-managed exacerbation would have to be avoided every 2–4 years to cover the additional drug cost. In contrast, to cover the £145 extra annual cost of Symbicort Turbohaler (200 µg/12 µg/day) compared with increasing the dose of BDP (CFC-free) to 400 µg/day, at least one hospital-managed exacerbation would have to be avoided per year for every 3–14 patients on the combination inhaler.

In summary, the extra annual cost to the NHS of combination inhalers compared with an increased dose of the different ICS drugs as monotherapy varies enormously depending on the exact ICS product used. When the more expensive ICS preparations are considered (derived by use of the weighted mean cost of all ICS preparations), then only the combination inhaler Seretide Evohaler is generally cheaper than an increased dose of ICS alone. However, for the cheapest ICS products, the additional cost implied by using a combination inhaler (instead of increasing the ICS dose) will often be £100 or more per year. Although this does not, perhaps, appear to be a large difference, this exploratory analysis shows that to achieve cost savings the combination inhaler would need to at least avert approximately four GP-managed exacerbations or avert one hospital-managed exacerbation among 10 people on the drug for a year.

We appreciate that this basic 'cost savings' or 'cost offset' analysis does not take into account the other important benefits to individuals and their families of avoiding exacerbations or having generally improved asthma control in between exacerbations. Nor does it capture the longer term cost impact of avoiding exacerbations on reducing the likelihood over time of treatment step-up. However, given the paucity of other reliable sources of effectiveness data, we hope that it is a useful illustration of how much more effective combination inhalers would need to be in order to be cost saving compared with increasing ICS dose.

This illustration should also be read in the context of how likely these absolute differences in exacerbation rates could be for each of the different treatment options under consideration, given background exacerbation rates which may already be low. The results from the clinical effectiveness review highlighted that there are currently no trials that have compared the effectiveness of increasing the dose of ICS alone to the addition of a LABA with a lower dose of ICS in a paediatric population. Therefore, it is impossible to comment on the likely exacerbation rates associated with each of the treatment options, except to say that in adults these rates are typically fairly low.

Estimated costs of hospital- and GP-managed exacerbations are given in *Tables 53* and *54*.

Research question 4: combination versus separate inhalers at Step 3?

The cost comparison results presented below are justified on the basis that **we found no consistent evidence of differential effectiveness in trials comparing the comparators of interest** (see the section 'Review question 4 – ICS/LABA administered in separate or combination inhalers', p. 57).

TABLE 53 *Estimated cost of a hospital-managed exacerbation for children with asthma*

Resource type	Unit cost (£)	Source	% patients	% patients	Cost (£)
Oral steroids (prednisolone 2 × 25 mg/day for 10 days, as per BTS/SIGN Guideline)	0.1727 per dose	BNF	20 doses		3.45
Child asthma patients discharged from A&E:					
% of those with exacerbations who are discharged			39%[a]		
Arriving by ambulance/paramedic services	169	NSRC	39%	23%[a]	15.10
A&E other high-cost investigations	100	NSRC	39%	11%[a]	4.30
A&E low-cost investigations	74	NSRC	39%	18%[a]	5.20
A&E no investigations	62	NSRC	39%	71%[a]	17.22
Post-discharge GP follow-up	20	UCHSC	39%	64%[a]	4.97
Child asthma patients admitted from A&E:					
% of those with exacerbations who are admitted to hospital via A&E department			28%[a]		
Arriving by ambulance/paramedic services	169	NSRC	28%	41%[a]	19.50
A&E other high-cost investigations	151	NSRC	28%	18%[a]	7.65
A&E low-cost investigations	118	NSRC	28%	14%[a]	4.63
A&E no investigations	112	NSRC	28%	68%[a]	21.46
Hospital episode for treating asthma (paediatric)	721	NSRC	28%		202.75
ICU costs (3 bed-days in ICU, for 25% of those admitted via A&E)	1910	NSRC	28%	3[a] × 25%[a]	403.01
Child asthma patients admitted following GP referral:					
% admitted to hospital via GP referral			33%[a]		
GP appointment	20	UCHSC	33%		6.60
Hospital episode for treating asthma (paediatric)	721	NSRC	33%		237.77
ICU costs (mean = 1 bed-day in ICU, for 10% of those admitted via GP referral)	1910	NSRC	33%	1[a] × 10%[a]	63.01
All child asthma patients admitted to hospital:					
Post-discharge GP follow-up	20	UCHSC	61%	50%[b]	6.11
Post-discharge hospital outpatient follow-up	111	NSRC	61%	50%[b]	33.83
NHS cost per hospital-managed exacerbation					**1056.56**

BNF, British national Formulary No. 51 (March 2006);[228] ICU, intensive care unit; NSRC, National Schedule of Reference Costs 2005;[229] UCHSC, Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2005.[230]
[a] Administrative records of Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Trust and/or Southampton University Hospitals Trust.
[b] Authors' assumption.

TABLE 54 *Estimated cost of a GP-managed exacerbation for children with asthma*

Resource type	Unit cost (£)	Source	% patients	% patients	Cost (£)
Oral steroids (prednisolone 2 × 25 mg/day for 5 days, as per BTS/SIGN Guideline)	0.1727 per dose	BNF	10 doses		1.73
% of consultations that are in surgery hours:			80%[a]		
In-hours GP visit (half see GP)	£20	UCHSC	80%[a]	50%[a]	8.00
In-hours GP visit (half see practice nurse)	£9	UCHSC	80%[a]	50%[a]	3.60
Out-of-hours GP telephone consultation (all out-of-hours)	£22	UCHSC	20%[a]	100%[b]	4.40
Out-of-hours GP visit (half of those calling out-of hours)	£59	UCHSC	20%[a]	50%[b]	5.90
NHS cost per GP-managed exacerbation					**23.63**

BNF, British National Formulary No. 51 (March 2006);[228] UCHSC, Unit Costs of Health and Social Care 2005.[230]
[a] Clinical expert opinion/estimate.
[b] Authors' assumption.

Tables 55 and *56* show, for both of the currently available combination products (Seretide and Serevent), that the combination ICS with LABA product is always cheaper than taking the same drugs in separate inhalers. For taking BUD with FF, using Symbicort via Turbohaler is always cheaper than taking Pulmicort via Turbohaler (at the same BUD dose) and taking FF separately. The estimated annual savings vary between £57 and £190 depending on the exact preparation of FF used and the daily dose of BUD required.

For taking FP with SAL, using Seretide via Accuhaler is always cheaper than taking Flixotide Accuhaler (at the same FP dose) and SAL separately. The estimated annual savings vary from £132 (if on 200 µg FP per day) to £244 (if on 100 µg FP per day). Similarly, using Seretide via Evohaler is always either £189 or £274 cheaper than taking Flixotide via Evohaler (at the same FP dose) and taking SAL separately.

Comparisons with SAL delivered as Serevent Diskhaler are not shown. However, two blisters of Serevent Diskhaler per day costs £428 per year (£72 more than Serevent Accuhaler or Serevent inhaler), and therefore the difference in annual cost between separate and combination inhalers would be even greater.

Research question 5: FP/SAL versus BUD/FF at Step 3?

The cost comparison results presented below are justified on the basis that **we found no evidence**

TABLE 55 *Annual cost of combination versus separate inhalers: BUD with FF added*

Combination or BUD	FF	Annual cost (£) by daily dose of BUD	
		200 µg/day	400 µg/day
Symbicort Turbohaler (combination product)		201	402
Separate inhalers:	Oxis 4.5 µg (or 9 µg)[a]	369	437
Pulmicort Turbohaler, plus	Foradil 12 µg	391	458
Difference in annual cost (separate less combination):			
Separate inhalers:			
Pulmicort Turbohaler, plus	Oxis 4.5 or 9 µg	+169	+35
	Foradil 12 µg	+190	+57

[a] Oxis 4.5 and 9 µg are the same price per dose.

TABLE 56 *Annual cost of combination versus separate inhalers: FP with SAL added*

Preparation	Taken as	Annual cost (£) by daily dose of FP	
		100 µg/day	200 µg/day
As dry powder:			
Flixotide Accuhaler	2 blisters/day	78	155
Serevent Accuhaler (or aerosol inhaler)[a]	2 blisters/day[b]	356	356
Both (total)		434	511
Seretide Accuhaler (FP and SAL combined)	2 blisters/day[b]	190	379
Difference in annual cost		+244	+132
As aerosol:			
Flixotide Evohaler	4 puffs/day	33	66
Serevent aerosol Inhaler	4 puffs/day[b]	356	356
Both (total)		389	422
Seretide Evohaler (FP and SAL combined)	4 puffs/day[b]	115	233
Difference in annual cost		+274	+189

[a] Seretide Accuhaler and aerosol inhaler are the same price per µg.
[b] Each blister contains 50 µg of SAL and each puff contains 25 µg of SAL.

TABLE 57 *Comparison of the cost of currently available combination products*

Combination product	Taken as	200 µg BUD/day	400 µg BUD/day
Symbicort Turbohaler (100 µg:6 µg of BUD:FF combined)	1 or 2 puffs/day	201	402
		100 µg FP/day	**200 µg FP/day**
Seretide Accuhaler (100 µg:50 µg of FP:SAL combined)	1 or 2 blisters/day	190	379
Seretide Evohaler (50 µg:25 µg of FP:SAL combined)	2 or 4 puffs/day	115	233

of differential effectiveness in trials comparing the comparators of interest (see section 'Review question 5 – combination inhaler compared with combination inhaler', p. 60).

Table 57 compares the cost of taking ICS with LABA in the two currently licensed combination inhalers, Seretide and Symbicort. In making the comparison between these products we have assumed that 200 and 400 µg of BUD are equivalent to 100 and 200 µg of FP, respectively.

Symbicort is more expensive than both of the Seretide preparations that are recommended for use in children. The estimated annual savings to the NHS of using Seretide instead of Symbicort may be between £11 and £172. However, these differences rely heavily on the assumed 2:1 dose equivalence between BUD and FP, which is a rather crude rule of thumb (and not, for example, derived from a meta-analysis of trials of the relevant products in children). It should also be noted that the assumed equivalence of Symbicort to Seretide at half the ICS dose is based on only four head-to-head trials in adults, and in all these trials the Seretide comparator product was Seretide Diskus (which is marketed as Accuhaler in the UK) and all the trials were in adults and of doses that would not be recommended in children (typically comparing 500 µg/100 µg FP/SAL per day with 800, 1600 or 400 µg/12 µg of BUD/FF per day).

Summary of cost comparisons

What is the cheapest type of ICS?

For research question 1, the weighted mean annual cost of taking an ICS drug at 200 µg BDP–CFC (or equivalent) varies from £30 for BDP to £64 for BUD. In contrast, the weighted mean annual cost of taking an ICS drug at a higher dose of 400 µg BDP–CFC (or equivalent) varies over two-fold from £63 for BDP to £133 for FP. At this higher dose level, currently available BUD preparations cost on average £120 per year, only slightly less expensive than FP.

CFC-containing products are often considerably cheaper than the dry powder or HFA-propelled alternatives within the same drug class. As a consequence, and assuming that pack prices and relative market shares remain the same, when CFC-containing products are withdrawn the weighted mean annual cost of taking BDP will increase from £30 to £60 (at a 200 µg ICS/day dose level) and from £63 to £122 (at a 400 µg ICS/day dose level). Although the difference in mean price between CFC-containing and non-CFC-containing BUD products is also substantial (weighted means £76 versus £159), the CFC-containing products currently account for a much smaller proportion of BUD product sales and the dry powder products are relatively cheap. As a consequence, the exclusion of CFC-containing products causes an increase in the weighted mean annual cost of BUD (at 400 µg/day) of only £14 (from £120 to £134).

What these weighted averages often conceal, however, is very wide variations in the cost of individual preparations within each class of drug. For example, currently the cheapest way of obtaining 400 µg of BDP per day is by taking Becotide 100 µg four times daily (£0.0139 per dose = £20.37 per year); the most expensive way is to use Becodisks 100 µg four times daily (£0.0952 per dose = £138.94 per year). Similarly, for obtaining 400 µg of BUD per day, the cheapest product is Novolizer BUD 200 µg taken twice daily (£0.0959 per dose = £70.00 per year) and the most expensive product is Pulmicort Turbohaler 100 and 200 µg (£0.0925 and 0.185 per dose = £135.05 per year).

Which is cheapest – taking ICS with LABAs in combination or separate inhalers?

Overall, taking ICS with LABAs as either of the two currently available combination products is

cheaper than taking the relevant ingredient drugs in separate inhalers. Taking Symbicort Turbohaler instead of the same drugs in separate inhalers saves the NHS between £35 and £190 per patient per year. Taking Seretide Accuhaler or Evohaler instead of the same drugs in separate inhalers saves the NHS between £132 and £274 per patient per year.

Which combination inhaler is the cheapest?

Noting that this comparison crudely assumes that 200 and 400 µg of BUD are equivalent to 100 and 200 µg of FP, respectively, and also that 12 µg/day of FF has effectiveness equivalent to 100 µg/day of SAL, the Seretide Evohaler appears considerably cheaper than either Seretide Accuhaler or Symbicort Turbohaler. At the lower daily dose of 200 µg BUD or 100 µg FP per day, Seretide Evohaler is over £74 cheaper per year than both Seretide Accuhaler and Symbicort Turbohaler, and when taking 400 µg BUD or 500 µg FP per day, it is over £148 cheaper than these alternatives.

All of the comparisons described above have involved a number of simplifying assumptions, including (1) the relative doses of different products which are assumed to have equivalent effectiveness, (2) the combinations of products which are used to achieve any particular daily dose level of ICS or ICS with LABA and (3) using 2005 community prescription sales as a way of producing a weighted mean annual cost for each class of drugs. For these reasons, and because the range of available ICS and combination products is currently undergoing considerable change (with CFC-containing products being phased out and some new HFA-propelled products recently entering the market), the conclusions should be viewed with appropriate caution.

Chapter 5

Factors relevant to the NHS and other parties

Asthma is one of the most common chronic conditions in the UK, with a prevalence of approximately 5.2 million.[24] Therefore, the economic burden of asthma regarding both direct and indirect costs to the NHS is high. In 2005, expenditure on corticosteroids for respiratory conditions cost the NHS £436 million. Although it was only 15th in terms of the number of prescriptions issued, it is the third largest component of the total cost of community-dispensed drugs in England.

Estimates of the prevalence of treated asthma in children vary somewhat according to the source used to obtain them. However, estimates from the General Practice Research Database indicate that the prevalence of children being treated for asthma ranges from approximately 9.5 to 13.5% for boys and from 6.0 to 10.5% for girls. In both cases the age ranges used in these estimates were 0–4 and 5–15 years, and in both sexes the prevalence increased with increasing age. It is not clear from these data what percentage of these children are currently using ICS or ICS plus LABA. Estimates quoted in the background, from Neville and colleagues,[4] suggest that around one-third of children under 5 years old and 20–25% of children aged 5–15 years are treated at Step 1 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline or below. These very rough estimates suggest that the majority of children with asthma are treated with ICS, either alone or in combination with other drugs. As these data are fairly old (1994–5), it is likely that this proportion is currently higher.

Children with asthma place various demands on the NHS budget, ranging from the cost of prescribed asthma medications to various levels of health service use, including GP and nurse consultations, A&E department visits and hospital admissions. Each of these is associated with a varying level of cost.

ICS therapy alone

The cost comparisons presented in this review indicate that there are currently considerable differences in the mean annual cost between the different ICS preparations, and also large cost differences between individual products of each ICS drug. However, as highlighted from the limited evidence available, there appear to be few if any significant differences in effect between the different ICS which would offset the additional cost of the more expensive treatment options.

There are potential cost savings to be made for the NHS if patients who are currently treated with the more expensive ICS drugs or preparations were switched to a cheaper option. Currently the largest cost savings would be associated with switching all patients to BDP CFC-propelled devices at all dose ranges. However, this is not a realistic treatment strategy as CFC-propelled devices are due to be phased out in the near future, and there are additional GP consultation costs associated with a review to switch patients between treatment strategies and drugs. With the phasing out of CFC-propelled products, the cost of providing ICS therapy to the NHS is likely to increase. Additional costs will be associated with switching patients who are currently on CFC-propelled formulations to new preparations and the higher costs associated with all non-CFC-propelled preparations of ICS. The exact cost implications to the NHS are difficult to project, as it is likely that as CFC-propelled formulations are removed from the market, the relative market share of non-CFC formulations will change and new products will enter the market. In order to realise any potential cost savings, it may be important to review patients' ICS therapy in routine GP or nurse consultations and examine whether switches can potentially be made to cheaper preparations of the same product, which obviously has an associated cost in terms of patient education, follow-up and any further treatment changes that may need to be made if the treatment regimen is unsuitable.

Additionally it must be noted that any potential cost savings of switching patients between either products or preparations can easily be offset by the costs incurred by potentially higher exacerbation rates. The BTS/SIGN Guideline states that patients and clinicians should choose the preparation that most suits the individual patient. This will be based not only on the preparation, but also the device and the

complexity of the treatment regimen. It is therefore necessary that any potential switches to cheaper preparations should be done bearing in mind the patient's ability to use different inhaler types. This is particularly pertinent within a paediatric population as a higher percentage of exacerbations are managed either within an A&E department or by an inpatient hospital stay compared with the adult population. Both of these incur considerable costs to the NHS.

ICS plus LABA

There are potential direct savings to the NHS with a switch to combination ICS/LABA products delivered in the same inhaler from the same drugs delivered in separate inhalers. Taking Symbicort via Turbohaler is associated with an estimated annual saving between £57 and £190 depending on the exact preparation of FF used and the daily dose of BUD required compared with taking Pulmicort via Turbohaler and taking FF separately.

Taking Seretide via Accuhaler is associated with an estimated annual saving of between £132 and £244 (depending on the dose of FP) compared with taking Flixotide via Evohaler and taking SAL separately. Likewise, using Seretide via Evohaler is between £185 and £270 cheaper than taking the constituent drugs separately.

However, it is not clear to what extent the drugs are currently prescribed in separate inhalers. Given the concerns that the clinicians consulted for this report have expressed about the potential hazards of using LABAs without ICS, it is likely that most ICS plus LABA therapy is now prescribed in combination inhalers and so the potential for cost savings in this area may be limited.

We are also aware from discussions with clinicians for this report that there is an increasing tendency to prescribe ICS and LABA in combination inhalers instead of ICS alone at Step 2 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline. Reasons given for this practice include ease of use for patients, to get both preventer and reliever therapy in one device and concerns about over-use of reliever medication, particularly LABAs, on their own. As this practice is not in line with the Guideline, assessing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of this treatment strategy is outside the scope of this report and has not been investigated. It is likely, however, that a significant proportion of current prescribing cost may reflect ICS and LABA use that is not strictly according to the Guideline, making the estimation of potential cost savings more difficult.

Chapter 6
Discussion

Undertaking this assessment has highlighted the difficulties in assessing intervention effects for the treatment of asthma. In the most part these are a reflection of the complex nature of the disease and the way that by necessity outcomes are defined and measured within clinical trials. In the sections below a brief summary of these issues is outlined.

Assessing the effectiveness of interventions for asthma

Asthma is a common chronic condition with a number of definitions based on disease process, clinical symptoms and their pattern over time and response to external stimuli. Each definition defines different populations in terms of severity, the underlying pathological process and the likely disease trajectory. No one objective test can be used definitively to diagnose asthma in children and the diagnosis may only be made after a period of observation and trials of treatment, particularly in very young children. Asthma is also partly defined by the variation of symptoms over time, thus making the detection of changes due to interventions more difficult to identify.

In terms of outcomes of treatment for asthma, death is very uncommon and so is not an informative outcome measure for assessing the effectiveness of treatment at levels of severity within the scope of this report. The wealth of other outcome measures that are commonly reported can broadly be divided into the categories of lung function, symptoms, acute exacerbations, use of rescue medication and AEs, but no standardised measures are used consistently in trials. Measures of lung function such as FEV_1 and morning and evening PEF are among some of the most commonly reported outcomes. However, such measures are less useful in children as objective measures of lung function are often difficult to obtain and may be unreliable, particularly in young children. Additionally, although FEV_1 is widely reported in trials, it may be expressed as absolute changes or % predicted, thus preventing clear comparison between the results of different studies. Symptoms are also widely reported, but trials do not use consistent methods for scoring symptoms or defining measures such as SFDs or SFNs. For example, SFDs were defined as diversely as "a 24-hour period with a symptom score of zero" and "percentage of days without cough/wheeze/shortness of breath/chest tightness". Very few studies provided any indication of whether symptom measurement instruments had been validated. Similarly, definitions of exacerbations are highly heterogeneous, ranging from those defined as a fall in PEF of at least 30% on two consecutive days to those necessitating emergency treatment at a healthcare institution. Very few trials report HRQoL, which, in addition to being important in its own right, is needed to inform CUAs. Additionally, the way in which AEs are defined is often poorly reported, and it is often unclear as to which events are measured and the severity of these. This limits the degree to which comparisons of differences in the type and rate of AEs can be made between trials.

Although lung function provides the most objective assessment of response to treatment, and probably more closely reflects the underlying disease process, the clinical significance of reported changes in lung function is not clear. Disease severity also relates to the underlying disease process, reflected in lung function and symptoms, but is most commonly defined by level of medication. Patients on substantial amounts of medication may be classified as having moderate or severe disease, but this classification will give no indication of their level of symptoms, which may be well or poorly controlled.

The aim of treatment is to control symptoms and enable patients to lead as normal a life as possible, so well-controlled asthma is a composite concept that varies between patients and professionals. It is dependent on any given patient's expectations for their lifestyle (e.g. being active versus sedentary or willingness to avoid known trigger factors), in addition to their acceptance of a regular treatment regimen. Each individual therefore must balance these factors to allow them to achieve an acceptable level of symptoms and medication. Part of this balance is the extent to which patients will adhere to a medication regimen when they are symptom free; many will adhere while they are

symptomatic, but choose to reduce treatment levels once symptom free. This step down in treatment may be appropriate in response to symptoms, but it may happen too quickly and lead to a return of symptoms or an exacerbation. Mild exacerbations may either be managed by the patient alone by increasing medication use, or be managed within a primary care setting, leading to the wide variation in definition referred to above. From the perspective of assessing cost-effectiveness, however, it is particularly important to be able to identify the healthcare resource use associated with more severe exacerbations. These are usually defined as those exacerbations requiring hospital admissions or attendance in emergency departments, but many non-clinical factors influence admission to hospital, particularly for young children.

Assessing differences in healthcare costs for the treatment of asthma is difficult, because of the difficulty in deriving a single representative cost for each drug. There are a range of alternative products, available in a range of doses and delivered by different devices for each drug. Therefore, there can be a number of ways of achieving any given daily dose of a particular drug, with significant consequences for the cost of delivering that dose. In order to make any comparisons in terms of costs between the different drugs, assumptions have to be made regarding dose equivalence and the way in which the target daily dose is achieved.

A further assumption must be made regarding the context of the BTS/SIGN Guideline for assessing intervention effects of the different comparators under consideration. Although the Guideline is well established and has been used for a number of years within the UK, it is clear that many clinical trials are not set within its context, and the treatment regimens assessed do not fit neatly into the Guideline steps. Additionally, the effects of concomitant medication use, such as the addition of a leukotriene receptor antagonist or theophylline, for patients treated at Step 4 of the Guideline has not been reviewed, despite the fact that most patients would not be treated on high-dose ICS alone at this step.

The two other areas that have not been formally assessed in this assessment report are the issues of device type and concordance, issues which are inextricably linked. It is well recognised that a large proportion of the asthmatic population has difficulty in using particular inhaler devices. This difficulty relates particularly to pMDIs and to a lesser extent to DPIs. Both require the ability to coordinate inhalation with activation of the inhaler. However, within the context of a clinical trial, only those patients who are able to use the type of device under evaluation effectively will be eligible for inclusion in the trial. Evidence for the effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids and beta$_2$ agonists for asthma from clinical trials should therefore be considered carefully for its generalisability to the typical population with asthma, as opposed to a subgroup of patients selected for their ability to use the inhaler effectively. Additionally, given the probable device-related variations in both compliance with correct inhaler technique and adherence to recommended daily doses, the rate of concordance with treatment regimens is likely to be considerably higher in clinical trials than in routine practice. Although concordance rates were not formally assessed in the clinical effectiveness review, concordance rates were around 70–95% in the trials where reported. This is considerably higher than the rates observed in practice, for which it is generally observed that approximately 50% of patients take the full amount of prescribed medication (see Chapter 1). This figure is likely to vary considerably depending on the level of support patients receive in primary care and from asthma specialist nurses and their ability to use their prescribed inhaler devices.

Limitations of the evidence base

This review identified a very limited evidence base of trials including children under the age of 12 years and none including children under the age of 5 years. We have identified only eight trials that have been conducted solely on child populations under the age of 12 years: the rest include a proportion of children aged over 12 years, and none are exclusive to children under 5 years old. In those trials with a mixed child and adolescent population, the results are not reported separately. The trials that have been identified are generally of short duration (less than 6 months), with a treatment period of 12–24 weeks. These trials generally do not capture long-term outcomes, such as growth and impact on BMD that may be of most interest to clinicians and patients. A number of trials report various measures of adrenal function, but it is not clear how these results can be extrapolated to periods of treatment lasting years or decades rather than the weeks that the trials last. It is also not clear in the trials what constitutes the minimum clinically significant change for many of the reported

outcomes, such as lung function, symptoms or exacerbations. Lung function probably reflects the underlying disease process more closely than symptom measures of HRQoL, and exacerbations are probably only triggered when lung function drops below a certain threshold. Hence it is likely that lung function changes may still be detectable at a point in the disease process when patients have few, if any, symptoms.

The wide range of possible outcome measures, most with no widely accepted and standardised method of measuring them, makes comparison across studies difficult and combining studies in a meta-analysis inappropriate. Trials have also been conducted for a variety of reasons and are not necessarily powered to detect superiority of one ICS over another. It is also not always clear how well blinding is maintained when drugs are delivered through different devices, although some trials report the use of placebo devices. Reporting of baseline population characteristics and outcome measures is frequently poor or selective.

Review of clinical effectiveness

Of the 16 RCTs identified as relevant to this assessment, 12 have been included in published Cochrane systematic reviews. This assessment adds to this body of evidence, providing a systematic synthesis of these drugs within the context of a comprehensive and recognised care pathway. Below we discuss the key findings according to Steps 2–4 of the Guideline, embedded within our five review questions.

Review question 1: which inhaled corticosteroid is the most effective at low doses? (200–400 μg/day BDP/BUD equivalent) (Step 2 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline)

Note that for FP the equivalent doses are 100 to 200 μg/day (children aged over 4 years).

Five relevant RCTs of the efficacy and safety of ICS at doses up to 400 μg/day (BDP/BUD or equivalent, corresponding to the BTS/SIGN Guideline[1]) were included.

In general, all three of the ICS were associated with favourable changes across a range of outcomes. However, limited findings are reported, particularly in terms of statistical significance tests. Where such tests were reported, there were few statistically significant differences between them when evaluated in pairwise comparisons. The steroids might therefore be considered generally equivalent in clinical terms, although few studies explicitly aimed to assess clinical equivalence/non-inferiority.

The BTS/SIGN Guideline notes that BDP and BUD are approximately equivalent in clinical practice.[1] Similarly, the Cochrane review of BDP and BUD[186] noted few significant differences between them. In the current assessment, only one small trial of BUD compared with BDP was included. The trial was designed to evaluate the impact of stepwise increases in doses on adrenal function, as opposed to efficacy outcomes. That said, the trial did report that the treatments were comparable in terms of morning and evening PEF and use of rescue medication, although no statistical tests were reported. There was no significant difference between the groups in suppression of diurnal urinary free cortisol (irrespective of dose).

The BTS/SIGN Guideline also notes that FP provides equal clinical activity to BDP and BUD at half the dose.[1] This is based on a reported higher potency for FP. In the Cochrane review of FP compared with BDP or BUD[187] (of which 14 of the 57 included RCTs were in children), the only significant differences between the drugs when administered at a 1:2 dose ratio (FP:BDP/BUD) were for FEV_1 and morning PEF, in favour of FP. There were few differences between the drugs on other outcome measures, although limitations in the reported data prohibited meta-analysis of these outcomes. Only two studies comparing FP with BDP were included in the current assessment (a further three were included in the 'high' dose comparison of the two drugs, discussed under review question 2, below). Both of them tested the drugs in a 1:2 dose ratio (FP:BDP). Differences between them in size, length and outcomes measured make it hard to draw comparisons. The findings generally do not support the superiority of either drug. Where statistical comparisons were reported, they showed no significant differences between groups. This was the case for SFDs and SFNs, and for plasma cortisol. The proportion of patients experiencing an AE was similar between the treatments in the one trial that reported this outcome.

There were only two studies comparing FP with BUD (again, a further three were included in the 'high' dose comparison, below). One was a large study in which the dose of both drugs (dose ratio 1:1) was reduced by 50% every 5 weeks until

asthma was controlled. The other was a much smaller trial focusing on long-term safety over 12 months (dose ratio 1:2). There were no statistically significant differences between the treatments on any of the outcomes, including safety measures such as 24-hour urine cortisol, BMD and growth over 12 months.

In summary, from the limited evidence available, low-dose ICS, when evaluated in pairwise fashion, appear similar in effects, with no statistically significant differences between them where statistical tests have been reported.

Review question 2: which inhaled corticosteroid is the most effective at high doses? (400–800 µg/day BDP/BUD equivalent) (Step 4 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline)

Note that for FP high dose is greater than 200 µg/day.

Seven RCTs of the efficacy and safety of ICS at 'high' doses in excess of 400 µg/day (BDP/BUD or equivalent, corresponding to the BTS/SIGN Guideline[1]) were included. Although in general doses were within the 400–800 µg dose range, in some studies they reached as high as 1500 µg/day for BDP, 1200 µg/day for BUD and 750 µg/day for FP.

The results of comparisons of ICS at high doses were similar to those of comparisons of ICS at low doses in demonstrating few statistically significant differences between the steroids.

For the comparison of BDP with BUD, there was just one small short-term cross-over RCT. The primary outcome was to examine any differences in systemic effects, principally adrenal function. Urinary cortisol excretion was statistically significantly higher with BUD. There was no significant difference between the drugs for FEV_1.

Three RCTs compared FP with BDP, ranging from 12 weeks to 1 year in length. Results for lung function were inconsistent between different dose ratios, although for one of the dose ratios there was only one trial. When compared at a nominal 1:1 dose ratio (as measured in one trial), FP was significantly favourable for FEV_1, and also morning and evening PEF. There were no significant differences for symptoms or use of rescue medication. The incidence of exacerbations was similar and there were no statistically significant differences between the drugs for changes in morning serum cortisol and overnight urinary cortisol levels. There was a significant difference in growth rates, favouring FP. At a nominal 1:2 dose ratio (FP:BDP), measured in two small cross-over trials, there were no statistically significant differences between the drugs on any efficacy measures, including exacerbations. Rates of AEs appeared similar, and there were no statistically significant differences in mean urinary free cortisol levels and total cortisol levels.

There were also three RCTs comparing FP with BUD. In common with the comparison of FP with BDP, there was one nominal 1:1 dose ratio comparison and two 1:2 dose ratio comparisons (FP:BUD). Results were mixed, with FP significantly better in terms of lung function at dose ratio of 1:1 (one trial, not the accepted clinically equivalent dose ratio), but not for other outcomes. At a dose ratio of 1:2, one trial also reported a significantly favourable outcome for FP in terms of morning PEF, but not for other outcomes. The proportion of patients experiencing AEs was similar between the drugs, with no significant differences in one trial. There was no significant difference in changes in serum cortisol between groups in the one trial that reported this measure. FP was significantly favourable in terms of changes in growth/height.

In summary, when evaluated in pairwise fashion, there were few statistically significant differences between the high-dose ICS in efficacy outcomes. Where significant differences did exist they tended to favour FP, but this is largely at 1:1 dose ratios. Where only comparisons of the accepted clinically equivalent dose ratios are considered, even fewer significant differences are reported. There was no consistent pattern in effects across different dose ratios, although the small number of trials limits what can be concluded about this. Perhaps more importantly, there were few significant differences between the ICS in measures of adrenal suppression, which is of particular interest when ICS are prescribed at high doses in children. However, the trials did not appear to be adequately powered to detect differences on this outcome and clinical trials may not be the best type of study to measure this.

Review question 3: which is more effective: an ICS or a combination inhaler containing an ICS and a LABA? (Step2/Step 3 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline)

The clinical effectiveness review concentrated on the comparison of ICS alone versus ICS and

LABA where the ICS dose in the monotherapy arm was higher than in the combination arm, as this comparison appeared to be most relevant to the clinical decision at Step 2 of the Guideline (i.e. whether to increase the dose of ICS or add in a LABA). However, the review also identified trials comparing ICS alone with combination ICS and LABA where the ICS doses are similar in each arm. They are commented on below.

(a) ICS + LABA where the dose of the ICS is higher when used alone, compared with the dose in the combination inhaler

For patients who are inadequately controlled on low-dose ICS, the options include increasing the dose of the ICS, either within or beyond the 400 µg/day dose threshold, or adding in a supplemental treatment. The BTS/SIGN Guideline[1] recommends a trial of an add-on therapy for such patients, before increasing the ICS dose. In children aged 5–12 years, the first choice is a LABA. For children aged 2–5 years, a trial of a leukotriene receptor agonist is recommended. However, the scope of this assessment does not include add-on therapies other than LABAs and therefore we cannot comment on the efficacy and safety of such strategies in children of this age group.

Only one trial where the dose of ICS was higher than the dose in the combination inhaler arm was identified and included. This was a large multi-centre trial of over 2000 patients. However, only around 12% were children aged under 12 years. The only results that are reported separately for children are for growth rates and plasma cortisol (our accompanying assessment report in adults and children aged over 12 years reports the efficacy results for the full population). There was a significant difference in favour of the combination inhaler for growth, but there were no significant differences for plasma cortisol.

A Cochrane review of this treatment modality[188] found that combination therapy led to greater improvement in lung function, symptoms and use of rescue medication. It was also associated with fewer withdrawals due to poor asthma control. There was no significant difference between treatments in terms of reducing exacerbations requiring systemic corticosteroids. However, caution is advised in any extrapolation from this evidence base as only three of the 30 studies were in paediatric populations, and only eight of the studies used a combination inhaler (the remaining studies using separate inhalers to deliver ICS and LABA). Clearly, more RCTs evaluating this treatment strategy are needed in children, with a particular focus on impact on exacerbations, HRQoL and long-term safety.

(b) ICS + LABA where the dose of ICS is similar in both treatment arms

As discussed, the BTS/SIGN Guideline recommends either increasing the dose of ICS or adding in a supplemental drug, such as a LABA, for patients uncontrolled on low doses of ICS. However, a body of evidence exists, mainly in adult patients, comparing ICS with ICS and LABA where the ICS dose is similar in both strategies. These trials were conducted to evaluate the safety and efficacy of the combination inhalers compared with standard treatment with ICS.

In this assessment, two such trials were included, both multi-centre trials of reasonable size. One compared FP against FP/SAL in a combination inhaler and the other compared BUD against BUD/FF in a combination inhaler.

The trial that compared FP against FP/SAL was designed primarily to evaluate safety. The limited, unpublished, data for efficacy outcomes suggested that the combination inhaler was favourable for lung function outcomes and exacerbations, although it is not clear whether there were statistically significant differences. The treatments appeared similar for symptoms and use of rescue medication and AEs.

When BUD was compared against BUD/FF in a combination inhaler, the latter was statistically significantly more favourable for changes in FEV_1, and morning and evening PEF. For other outcomes, such as symptoms, use of rescue medication and AEs, the combination inhaler was either favourable or the treatments appeared similar, but no significance testing was reported.

Review question 4: ICS and LABA administered in a combination inhaler compared with separate inhalers

The scope for this assessment, as set by NICE, includes the use of ICS and LABA in a combination inhaler, but not in separate inhalers. It should therefore be acknowledged that there is a wider evidence base for the use of ICS and LABA in separate inhalers compared with ICS alone, although mainly in adults, as summarised by the Cochrane Collaboration.[188,189] The scope does, however, cover the use of ICS + LABA in a combination inhaler compared with the two in separate inhalers.

In this assessment only one such trial was identified, a multi-centre RCT of over 200 children. The key findings were that there were no statistically significant differences between the two treatment modalities for measures of lung function, and the mean difference in morning PEF was within a defined range for clinical equivalence. They were similar for symptoms, use of rescue medication and exacerbations, but no statistical data were reported.

In practice, decisions about whether a combination inhaler or separate inhalers are used will be based on factors such as ease of use, convenience and the likelihood of concordance. Expert clinical opinion suggests that one of the advantages of combination inhalers is that the risk of patients failing to take their ICS is reduced. When ICS and LABA are prescribed separately, it is suggested that the rapid symptom relief provided by the LABA may mean that some patients are less likely to take their ICS routinely. The LABA will not have reduced the underlying inflammation and patients may be at increased risk of exacerbation. The BTS/SIGN Guideline[1] makes it clear that LABAs should not be used without ICS.

Review question 5: combination inhaler compared with combination inhaler? (FP/SAL versus BUD/FF)

No trials were identified which compared the two combination trials head-to-head in children. We are therefore unable to comment on the relative efficacy and safety of the two inhalers. Clearly RCTs assessing the two combination inhaler therapies head-to-head with a focus on exacerbation rates, SFDs and safety are needed.

Estimates of costs

It was not possible to develop a valid and credible cost–utility model for the treatment of asthma with an ICS used either alone or in combination with a LABA at the appropriate step of the BTS/SIGN Guideline in a paediatric population. The main reason for this was the lack of direct head-to-head trial data for the three ICS comparators considered in questions 1 and 2, ICS versus other ICS, and the lack of relevant trial data in questions 3–5. Poor reporting of trial results, where they existed, meant that the reported data could not be used because of incomplete information. We therefore adopted a cautious approach to the economic analysis for this report, and present for each question either a cost comparison or an exploratory cost offset analysis. These two different methods of analysis were used appropriately in relation to the findings from the accompanying clinical effectiveness review. A cost comparison of the different ICS and ICS plus LABA preparations was undertaken where the clinical effectiveness review showed no consistent evidence of differential treatment effects between the comparators. An exploratory cost offset analysis was undertaken where the clinical effectiveness review indicated that there were significant differences in effects between the two comparators. This examined the number of hospital- or GP-managed exacerbations that would need to be avoided in order to offset any cost differences between the different treatment strategies.

Cost comparisons

These cost comparisons have been shown in Chapter 4. They relied on a range of assumptions for arriving at each mean annual cost of taking a particular ICS or combination inhaler. In particular, they used the conventional (GINA and BTS/SIGN) dose equivalence ratios for different ICS drugs and/or propellants, and used the 2005 community-dispensed prescription sales data for weighting the cost of different products within each drug type. For these reasons, they should probably be viewed as a form of illustrative economic 'what if' analysis: 'If they were equally effective, what would be the likely differences in the annual cost of treatment?'

ICS versus ICS

There are considerable differences in weighted mean annual cost between the different ICS, and also large cost differences between different preparations of the same ICS. The annual cost varies seven-fold between different preparations of BDP to less than three-fold between different FP preparations. The cost differences between different BDP preparations are smaller, however, if the (typically cheaper) CFC-propelled preparations are excluded from the analysis. Our systematic review of the published research evidence has highlighted the fact that there is little demonstrated difference in effectiveness between the different ICS comparators under trial conditions. Therefore, there appears to be little justification for the sometimes considerable cost differences between different products containing the three licensed drugs. However, other differences between the products, for example inhaler device characteristics and propellant taste, will probably influence how effectively or easily they are used. Yet in most clinical trials assessing

the effectiveness of an ICS, only those participants who are already able to use the inhaler device type being trialled effectively and who are willing to tolerate other properties of the propellant will actually be eligible for inclusion.

It is well recognised that a large proportion of the asthmatic population has difficulty in using particular inhaler devices. This difficulty relates particularly to pMDIs and to a lesser extent to DPIs. Both require the ability to coordinate inhalation with activation of the inhaler. All trial evidence of the effectiveness of inhaled treatment for asthma should therefore be considered carefully for its generalisability to the general population with asthma rather than the subgroup able to use the trial devices.

In applying these cautions on the ease of use of inhaler devices to the results of the cost comparison analysis, the cost savings that could be realised by using the cheapest ICS via the cheapest device (a pMDI) might well result in an increase in other healthcare resource use through an increase in exacerbations resulting from poorer control of asthma from lack of adherence to treatment regimens or inability to use a pMDI. Although we cannot quantify this likely increase, concordance with treatment in trials is around 80%, but in the general population of children with asthma it may be that fewer than 50% take the full amount of prescribed medication (see Chapter 1). Addition of a spacer device to the pMDI, or choosing a more expensive delivery device that the patient prefers and is able to use easily, might well improve concordance, thus minimising other healthcare resource use.

Summary of the cost analyses

At present, it is clear that BDP CFC-propelled products are the cheapest product available for the treatment of asthma in children. However, as CFC-propelled products are phased out, the cost of ICS treatment is likely to increase considerably. When non CFC-propelled products are considered, then there is less variation in the costs between the three ICS, although BDP still appears to be marginally cheaper than either BUD or FP. When considering the cost-effectiveness of increasing the dose of ICS alone or adding a LABA to a lower dose of ICS, it is clear that the extra annual cost of combination therapy varies enormously depending on the exact ICS product used. For the more expensive ICS products, their use at higher dose is more expensive than some of the combination inhaler products, whereas the use of cheaper ICS products in preference to a combination inhaler will be cost saving. Overall, it should be noted that although the use of weighted averages can provide a useful way of representing the major differences between the different ICS drugs and LABAs, they conceal the wide variations in the cost of individual products. This means that any generic conclusions about cost-effectiveness, at the level of each ICS drug either versus another ICS or an ICS/LABA combination, are not possible as they are confounded by the sheer number and differences in price of the products available for each drug.

All of the comparisons described above have also involved a number of simplifying assumptions, including (1) the relative doses of different products which are assumed to have equivalent effectiveness, (2) the combinations of products which are used to achieve any particular daily dose level of ICS or ICS with LABA and (3) using 2005 community prescription sales as a way of producing a weighted mean annual cost for each group of drug preparations. For these reasons, and because the range of available ICS and combination products is currently undergoing considerable change (with CFC-containing products being phased out and some new HFA-propelled products recently entering the market), the conclusions should be viewed with appropriate caution.

Strengths and limitations of the review

Strengths and limitations of the systematic review of clinical effectiveness

In terms of strengths, this assessment has followed transparent and accepted methods for conducting systematic reviews. A protocol outlining the scope and methods was agreed and published early on in the process. An expert advisory group comprising clinicians specialising in respiratory medicine, GPs and health economists has provided advice throughout the assessment and commented on a draft of this report.

The effect of inhaler devices was outside the scope of the present assessment. However, in order to reduce any potential confounding in the assessment of the different comparators under consideration, only trials in which the inhaler type and propellant were the same in each of the trial arms were included in the systematic review.

In terms of limitations, it was not possible to report every outcome measure reported in each of

the included trials. As discussed earlier, there are numerous ways of measuring and reporting measures of asthma control. To achieve brevity, we prioritised key measures from each of the relevant outcomes. For example, of the various ways of measuring lung function, we only reported FEV_1 and morning and evening PEF, as these appeared to be the most commonly used and clinically meaningful. Consequently, in some trials the primary outcome has not been reported in this assessment if it was not a measure that had been prioritised. Furthermore, some of the outcomes that have been reported here may have been secondary outcomes for which trials were not necessarily powered to detect differences. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

It was not possible to conduct meta-analysis in order to provide a quantitative estimate of treatment effect. This would have provided greater statistical power to show any potential differences. Consequently, much of the assessment of clinical effectiveness has been reported narratively.

The quality of reporting in the trial reports was poor in places. For example, the brand name for the inhaled steroids and the devices used to dispense them were not always mentioned. Where possible, we contacted authors for further clarification, but time did not allow for this to be conducted routinely.

As discussed earlier, in order to avoid duplication, this assessment aimed to build upon previously published evidence syntheses of the efficacy and safety of ICS. The Cochrane Airways Review group kindly made available data from their systematic reviews. We performed data extraction and quality assessment only on the trials that met our inclusion criteria that were supplemental to the Cochrane reviews. The completed data extraction and quality assessment forms for these supplemental studies are available in Appendix 4. Further details of the remaining studies can be found in the Cochrane reviews.[73,187–190]

The majority of the included trials tended to be of short duration, and so do not provide data on the long-term consequences of treatment for chronic asthma or the longer term side-effects associated with therapy.

No trials of treatment in children aged under 5 years have been identified for this review. Conducting trials in young children can be problematic in terms of obtaining consent and assessing outcomes such as lung function and symptoms. Since asthma in this population may well respond differently to ICS and other treatment options, it is of concern that there does not appear to be a direct formal evidence base on which to base clinical decisions. It was therefore not possible to provide a stratified analysis to examine the effects of ICS and/or LABA use in infants and young children as requested in the assessment scope.

No trials have been conducted in a paediatric population that have assessed the effectiveness of a combination inhaler containing FP/SAL versus BUD/FF. Therefore, it is not possible to compare the relative effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of these treatments for chronic childhood asthma.

Grounding the review within the context of the BTS/SIGN Guideline placed a number of limitations on the comparisons between different treatment strategies that could be assessed. For example, the strategy of adding a LABA to an ICS at Step 2 rather than Step 3 was outside the scope of the present assessment. Such a strategy would involve the instigation of combination therapy in a potentially steroid-naïve population that have been treated predominantly with a SABA. At present such strategies are outside the recommended guidance in the BTS/SIGN Guideline.

Strengths and limitations of the economic evidence and analyses

Economic analysis has been severely restricted as we were unable to populate the cost–utility model from the relevant trial data available to assess cost–utility. Ideally, an economic evaluation in asthma should capture the quality of life and cost impacts both of different levels of control and exacerbation severity and frequency, and also be able to compare all potential treatments concurrently. To some extent, therefore, all existing evaluations, including those submitted by industry sponsors to NICE, are limited. Evaluations based solely on SFDs, for example, may not adequately capture the full spectrum of costs and disutility associated with other indicators of poor control and exacerbations. Conversely, evaluations dominantly based on exacerbations as an outcome may not fully reflect differences in costs and utility associated with varying levels of 'non-exacerbation' asthma control. In the absence of established models that can include all relevant technologies in a single evaluation and also capture the consequences of differences in all levels of control, most comparisons have focused

on an analysis of the costs associated with the mean annual treatment costs for each ICS and LABA drug.

Strengths

The cost comparison approach that we adopted was a pragmatic response to the lack of evidence of differential clinical effectiveness for some research questions. In the absence of a formal model-based CUA or CEA, these comparisons clearly illustrate the wide variation in possible costs for each ICS drug, and how these vary by product type/strength, daily dose and inhaler type. Although we have chosen to show averages for each ICS, we have put them in context by showing both weighted and unweighted means and also the cheapest and most expensive product for each ICS at each dose level. With a view to other changes currently taking place in the UK market for asthma drugs, we have also generated estimates with and without CFC-propelled products included.

Limitations

The main limitation of our economic analyses is that they do not include a model-based CUA which integrates all relevant cost and effectiveness evidence relevant to the decision problems. This omission is partly due to the nature of the published trial evidence base for these decision problems, but is also to do with the inherent challenges of modelling the full spectrum of asthma outcomes, from symptom control and quality of life impacts to severe exacerbations.

All of the cost comparisons discussed above have involved a number of necessary simplifying assumptions including (1) the relative doses of different ICS drugs which are currently assumed to have equivalent effectiveness, (2) the exact mix of products which would probably be used to achieve any particular daily dose level of ICS or ICS with LABA and (3) using 2005 community prescription sales as a way of producing a weighted mean annual cost for each group of drug preparations. For these reasons, and because the range of available ICS and combination products is currently undergoing considerable change (with CFC-containing products being phased out and some new HFA-propelled BDP products recently entering the market), the conclusions should be viewed with appropriate and substantial caution.

Other considerations

As already discussed, the relevance to decision-makers of trial-based evidence on the clinical effectiveness of asthma treatments is often limited by a range of factors to do with the characteristics of the patients in the trials, or the inevitably partial selection of drugs and inhaler devices that have mostly been compared. The evidence base may therefore be on comparisons between technologies that are not relevant within current clinical guidelines, focus on efficacy and safety rather than 'real-world' (e.g. adherence-diminished) effectiveness and be conducted in patients who are specially selected to be able to comply or who are monitored more thoroughly than would be the case in routine clinical care. Furthermore, the fact that most choices between different asthma drugs involve a simultaneous choice of inhaler type (or, choice of inhaler device may effectively determine the asthma drug 'chosen'), creates further difficulties in using an evidence base which is largely aimed at comparing either drugs or devices.

In addition to these difficulties, it may be that the average effectiveness results that clinical trials mainly produce are inappropriate in another more fundamental way. Asthma drug treatment decisions are inherently reversible. Also, the drugs themselves are, in general, safe (certainly at the low to moderate doses with which most people are managed). This is why asthma treatment guidelines are implicitly based on an iterative approach of 'trying out' what works best in achieving symptom control for individual patients. Given such a clinical context, with the possibility of multiple reversible clinical decisions, there may be a legitimate argument for retaining the current variety in products, in terms of both drug types and inhaler devices, given acceptable variations in average effectiveness and costs. In addition to variations in people's ability and willingness to use different inhaler devices effectively, it may be that there are subtle differences in people's response to the different ICS drugs themselves (or to the addition of a LABA to an ICS) which mean that some individuals, for example, respond more to particular ICS compounds than others.

Chapter 7
Conclusions

The literature on the clinical and cost-effectiveness of the three inhaled corticosteroids, BUD, BDP and FP, used alone or in combination with a LABA in the treatment of chronic asthma in children aged under 12 years is limited. The RCTs included in this review were predominantly of one ICS comparator versus another, used at doses within the range of Steps 2–4 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline. There was no evidence available on whether the addition of a LABA to a dose of ICS at a range within Step 2 of the Guideline is more effective than increasing the dose of ICS alone. No trials were identified that assessed the relative effectiveness of the combination treatments of ICS plus LABA (Symbicort and Seretide) currently licensed for use in children.

No evidence is available on the clinical effectiveness of any of these treatments for children under the age of 5 years.

ICS versus ICS

From the available evidence, the clinical effectiveness and short-term safety of the three inhaled corticosteroids, used at either low (Step 2) or high (Step 4) dose is similar. As no cost–utility model could be used to estimate cost-effectiveness across all technologies, cost comparisons were undertaken between the different ICS drugs. At the starting dose of 200 µg/day, BDP tends to be the cheapest ICS available, although when CFC-propelled products are excluded FP products can be the cheapest. At the higher doses of 400 and 800 µg/day, it remains the cheapest. When non-CFC-propelled products are considered, the mean annual cost of ICS therapy increases for all three ICS, but overall cost differences between the drugs diminish. However, the use of weighted averages to represent the cost associated with each ICS tends to conceal the wide variations in costs apparent between the individual preparations of each drug and the wide overlap in costs between the drugs.

ICS versus ICS + LABA

No evidence is available on clinical effectiveness of ICS on its own versus ICS + LABA at a lower dose of ICS. There is limited evidence that ICS + LABA in a combination inhaler is more effective than the same dose of ICS on its own. When the weighted mean cost of all types of ICS at increased dose is considered, only one of the combination inhaler preparations (Seretide Evohaler) is slightly cheaper than ICS at a two-fold increased dose. Compared with the lowest cost preparation for each ICS drug, both the combination inhalers are more expensive than the ICS products at increased dose.

ICS plus LABA versus ICS plus LABA

From the limited evidence available, there were no significant differences in the clinical effectiveness of ICS plus LABA delivered concurrently compared with delivery in separate inhalers. Cost comparison between the two regimens showed that taking an ICS with a LABA as either of two currently available combination products (Symbicort and Seretide) is usually cheaper than taking the relevant ingredient drugs in separate inhalers.

The use of single inhaler therapy not only provides a simpler treatment regimen, but may also enhance concordance with maintenance ICS therapy and diminish the potential use of a LABA on its own. From this review, there appear to be no significant clinical differences in effects between the two modes of treatment delivery, and potential cost savings to the NHS with use of a combination inhaler compared with separate inhalers.

Based on a comparison of the costs only, BUD in combination with FF (Symbicort Turbohaler) is more expensive than both the FP/SAL (Seretide Evohaler or Seretide Accuhaler) combination drugs currently available.

Research recommendations

There is a clear lack of research in a number of areas that have been covered in the present assessment on the effectiveness and

cost-effectiveness of ICS used alone or in combination with a LABA for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under 12 years of age.

The diagnosis of asthma in young children is extremely difficult, as viral wheeze is common in young children. However, a scoping review, using broad inclusion criteria, followed by research synthesis as appropriate, is required to assess the requirements for additional primary research on the clinical effectiveness of treatment for asthma in children aged under 5 years. Such a review could also usefully include all treatment options, pharmacological and non-pharmacological, for asthma.

There is currently no trial evidence available to inform the relative effectiveness of the two combination inhalers of FP/SAL and BUD/FF within a paediatric population. The results of this assessment suggest that for FP/SAL there are no significant differences in effectiveness in terms of whether the drugs are delivered in a single inhaler or concurrently in two separate inhalers. However, as ease of treatment regimen may potentially affect concordance, then a direct head-to-head trial that compares the two combination therapies of FP/SAL and BUD/FF is warranted.

No trials have assessed the relative effects of increasing the dose of ICS or adding a LABA to a lower dose of ICS if control is not maintained at doses within Step 2 of the BTS/SIGN Guideline. It is therefore important that the relative effects of these two treatment strategies are compared within a paediatric population, particularly given concerns about the AEs of long-term ICS use. Given the chronic nature of asthma and that treatment may be necessary on a long-term basis from childhood, it is important to assess whether the addition of a LABA to a lower dose of ICS could potentially be as effective as an increased dose of ICS alone, but also be steroid sparing.

There is a need for the long-term AEs associated with ICS use to be assessed systematically. Initial searches undertaken for this assessment indicate that there are at present no good-quality systematic reviews available that have assessed all potential long-term AEs associated with the three different ICS comparators. Published reviews have tended to focus on the use of short-term RCT safety data with a length of follow-up between 1 and 2 years. Therefore, to assess adequately the longer term sequel of ICS use, future reviews should aim to examine studies of longer term follow-up, and use appropriate data sources such as cohort, case–control studies and registry data where available.

Need for standardisation of outcome measures and reporting

The evidence base that was assessed in this review was highly heterogeneous in terms of both the way in which outcome measures had been defined and measured and also in the detail in which results were reported. Future trials of treatment for chronic asthma in children should aim to standardise further the way in which outcome measures are defined. There should be a greater focus on patient-centred outcomes such as HRQoL and symptoms. This will provide a more meaningful estimation of the impact of treatment on asthma control.

Methods of reporting also require standardisation. In particular where statistical results are presented, means and SDs should be provided. This will enable such studies to be included in quantitative meta-analysis. The statistical methods of analysis should also be explicitly stated. In addition, the overall trial methods should be explicitly documented and reported with adherence to the CONSORT statement[231] standard of reporting being made a priority.

Acknowledgements

We particularly acknowledge the help of the Expert Advisory Group for this project, who provided advice and comments on the protocol and/or drafts of this report. Any errors that remain are the responsibility of the authors.

We would also like to thank Professor Andy Clegg, Professor of Health Services Research and Director of the Southampton Health Technology Assessment Centre (SHTAC); Ms Joanna Kirby, Research Fellow, SHTAC; Dr Luminita Grigore, Research Fellow, Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development; Ms Liz Hodson, Wessex Institute for Health Research and Development; Dr Sheila Turner, Research Fellow, National Coordinating Centre for Health Technology Assessment (NCCHTA); Ailsa Snaith, Independent Reviewer, Aberdeen; and Sharlene Ting, Independent Reviewer, Birmingham. At PenTAG, Jo Perry provided invaluable administrative project support and Stuart Mealing, Ruth Garside and Rod Taylor all offered useful insights.

This project was funded by the Health Technology Assessment Programme (project number 04/30/02) and commissioned on behalf of NICE. The views and opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funders. Any errors remain the responsibility of the authors.

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Appendix 1

Expert advisory group

Members of the expert advisory group were as follows:

Dr Nick Adams, Consultant Physician; Dr Alan Cade, Consultant Paediatrician, Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust; Dr Chris Cates, Coordinating Editor, Cochrane Airways Review Group; Dr Tim Harrison, Consultant Physician (Pharmacotherapy), Nottingham City Hospital; Professor Stephen Holgate, MRC Clinical Professor of Immunopharmacology, Southampton General Hospital; Ms Emily Lancsar, Lecturer in Economics, University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Ms Sarah Lewis, Reader in Medical Statistics, Division of Respiratory Medicine, Nottingham City Hospital; Dr David Mabin, Consultant Paediatrician, RD&E NHS Foundation Trust; Dr David Seamark, GP, Honiton Medical Practice; Dr David Sinclair, Consultant Physician, Respiratory Medicine, Torbay District Hospital; Professor Anne Tattersfield, Emeritus Professor of Respiratory Medicine; Professor John Warner, Professor of Child Health, Department of Child Health, University of Southampton.

Appendix 2

Assessment protocol

Technology Assessment Report commissioned by the NHS R&D HTA Programme on behalf of the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence – Final Protocol. 4 May 2006

1. Title of the project

Inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under the age of 12 years

2. Name of TAR teams and 'leads'

Southampton Health Technology Assessment Centre (SHTAC); Peninsula Technology Assessment Group (PenTAG).

3. Plain English summary

Chronic asthma is a condition that affects around 5 million children and adults in the UK. The symptoms can include wheezing, shortness of breath and general difficulties in breathing, and can significantly disrupt daytime activity and the ability to sleep well at night. Symptoms occur as a result of tightening of the muscles surrounding the airways and inflammation of the airway lining. People with asthma need to maintain good control of the condition to prevent worsening of symptoms or 'asthma attacks'. This can be achieved by following a healthy lifestyle, reducing contact with substances likely to aggravate asthma and regular and correct use of prescribed drugs. People with mild asthma can usually manage the condition through use of an inhaler device containing a short-acting beta$_2$ agonist (e.g. salbutamol) on an as-needed basis. Short-acting beta$_2$ agonists are known as bronchodilators and work by relaxing the airway muscles to improve the passage of air into the lungs. When this is not enough to prevent worsening of symptoms, patients may be prescribed one of the five available corticosteroids, usually via a hand-held inhaler. A corticosteroid works to reduce inflammation in the airways. The corticosteroid is usually inhaled twice per day for a given period of months or longer (in addition to the inhaled short-acting beta$_2$ agonist, as needed) until asthma is stabilised, at which time it may be gradually reduced. Often a low, regular dose of inhaled corticosteroid is needed to control symptoms.

Where asthma symptoms continue to be difficult to control, the daily dose of inhaled corticosteroid may be increased, or a third drug may be prescribed. Inhaled long-acting beta$_2$ agonists, of which there are two, are commonly used in these situations. They may be given separately or in a combined inhaler containing the inhaled corticosteroid. Other drugs may be given in cases where control is still not adequate.

There are a number of different inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists available, in different combinations and via different inhalers. This study will systematically summarise the results of clinical trials which compare the different inhaled corticosteroids with each other; trials which compare inhaled corticosteroids combined with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists with use of inhaled corticosteroids only; and trials which compare the two different combinations of inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists. The report will include an economic evaluation, to compare the costs and benefits of the different drugs to indicate whether they represent good value for money from the NHS and Personal Social Services (PSS) perspective.

4. Decision problem

The aim of this health technology assessment is to assess the clinical-effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids (ICS), and inhaled corticosteroids in combination with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists (LABA), in the treatment of chronic asthma in children aged under 12 years.

4.1. Background to asthma

Asthma is a condition characterised by inflammation and narrowing of the bronchial airways leading to wheezing, cough, chest tightness, shortness of breath and general difficulties in breathing. Symptoms vary from mild intermittent wheezing or coughing to severe attacks requiring hospital treatment. Severity can be defined on the basis of symptoms, lung function and incidence of exacerbations.

Definitions vary but a classification system has been proposed by the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA).[P1,P2] Asthma can be triggered by a number of stimuli, including allergens (e.g. animals, house dust mite), environmental factors (e.g. dust, pollution, tobacco smoke) and exercise. Family history of asthma and low birth weight may predispose people to the condition. Other risk factors include increasing age, lower social class and urban dwelling.[P3] Although common in children and young adults, asthma can affect people at any time of life.

Asthma is distinguished from other related conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or emphysema through reversible rather than progressive airway narrowing (although evidence is emerging that people with asthma do have some degree of decline in lung function over time). In young children, it is often not possible to measure lung function in order to confirm variable airway obstruction; diagnosis is then usually made on careful clinical history and examination.

Prevalence has increased considerably over recent decades, in both developed and developing countries. Reasons are complex, reflecting environmental and lifestyle factors. In the UK there are 5.2 million people (9%) with asthma, including 590,000 teenagers. In England and Wales the number of people affected is around 4.7 million. Although severe exacerbations of asthma may cause death, mortality from the condition is relatively low compared with other respiratory diseases such as COPD. Respiratory disease accounts for greater mortality in the UK (24% of total deaths) than coronary heart disease (21%) or non-respiratory cancer (19%). However, asthma is responsible for only 1% of respiratory deaths.[P3]

4.2. Management

The management of asthma includes several inter-linked approaches including medication (e.g. bronchodilators, corticosteroids), lifestyle modification, environmental changes (e.g. minimising the impact of allergens in the home or workplace), patient education (e.g. to encourage self-management and improve concordance with medication) and regular monitoring to assess disease control. Management is primarily the responsibility of the GP in collaboration with the patient, although specialist intervention may be required in severe cases. The aims of treatment are to relieve symptoms (e.g. wheeze, cough), improve health-related quality of life (including ability to work, study or sleep), improve lung function [i.e. forced expiratory volume 1 (FEV_1); peak expiratory flow rate (PEF)], minimise the requirement for relief (e.g. short-acting $beta_2$ agonists) and rescue (oral corticosteroids) medication and reduce adverse effects associated with medication.

The British Thoracic Society (BTS), in collaboration with the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN), have published clinical guidelines on asthma.[P4,P5] The guidelines cover a variety of aspects of management, including pharmacological management. They propose a stepwise approach to achieving symptom control (Appendix 9.1). Treatment is initiated at the step most appropriate to the initial severity of asthma and the person's day-to-day needs, with the aim of achieving early control of symptoms. Control is maintained by stepping up treatment as necessary and stepping down when control is good.

First-line treatment in mild intermittent asthma is with an inhaled short-acting $beta_2$ agonist, as required for symptom relief (e.g. salbutamol or terbutaline). Treatment is stepped up with the introduction of regular preventer therapy with ICS in addition to symptomatic use of an inhaled short-acting $beta_2$ agonist (Step 2). If necessary, a long-acting $beta_2$ agonist (LABA) is added (but not in children under the age of 4 years, for whom a leukotriene receptor agonist should be considered, and in children under 2 years old, where referral to a respiratory paediatrician should be considered) (Step 3). If control is still not adequate, the dose of the inhaled corticosteroid can be increased, in addition to introduction of a fourth drug such as a theophylline or a leukotriene receptor agonist (children aged 5–12 years) (Step 4). For children aged under 5 years, Step 4 involves referral to a respiratory paediatrician. For children aged 5–12 years, if response remains poor specialist care may be initiated with regular use of oral corticosteroids (e.g. prednisolone), in addition to the other drugs (Step 5).

In 2000, NICE issued guidance to the health service in England and Wales on the use of inhaler devices in children with chronic asthma aged under 5 years (Guidance No. 10), and in 2002 guidance for older children (aged 5–15 years, Guidance No. 38).

For children under the age of 5 years with chronic stable asthma, both corticosteroids and

bronchodilator therapy should be routinely delivered by a pressurised metered dose inhaler (pMDI) and a spacer system, with a facemask where necessary. Where this combination is not clinically effective for the child and depending on the child's condition, nebulised therapy may be considered. In the case of children aged 3–5 years, a dry powder inhaler (DPI) may also be considered.

For children aged 5–15 years, a press-and-breathe pMDI and suitable spacer device are recommended as the first-line choice for the delivery of inhaled corticosteroids. If adherence is likely to be poor, then other alternatives should be considered. For bronchodilators, a wider range of devices should be considered to take account of their more frequent spontaneous use, the greater need for portability and the clear feedback that symptom response provides to the device user. Over-arching principles when choosing an inhaler include the therapeutic need for the particular drug, the ability of the child to develop and maintain an effective technique with the specific device and the suitability of a device for the child's and carer's lifestyles, considering factors such as portability and convenience and the child's preference for and willingness to use a particular device.

A planned update of both sets of guidance in 2005 was not undertaken as it was found that little new evidence had emerged since the first guidance. They have both now been moved to the Institute's 'static' list of appraisals, which will not routinely be updated.

4.2.1. Inhaled corticosteroids (ICS)

ICS work to reduce bronchial inflammation. They are recommended for prophylactic treatment of asthma when patients are using a short-acting $beta_2$ agonist more than three times per week or if symptoms disturb sleep more than once per week, or if the patient has suffered exacerbations in the last 2 years requiring a systemic corticosteroid or a nebulised bronchodilator. Corticosteroid inhalers should be used regularly for maximum benefit.

There are currently three ICS licensed in the UK for children (see Appendix 9.2 for details of delivery devices. NB. High-dose inhalers are not licensed in children):

- beclometasone dipropionate [AeroBec (3M), Asmabec Clickhaler (Celltech), Beclazone Easi-Breathe (IVAX), Becloforte (Allen and Hanburys), Beclometasone Cyclocaps (APS), Becodisks (Allen and Hanburys), Becotide (Allen and Hanburys), Easyhaler (Ranbaxy), Filair (3M) and Pulvinal Beclometasone Dipropionate (Trinity)]
- budesonide [Budesonide Cyclocaps (APS), Easyhaler (Ranbaxy), Novolizer (Viatris) and Pulmicort (AstraZeneca)]
- fluticasone propionate [Flixotide (Allen and Hanburys)].

Beclometasone dipropionate, budesonide and fluticasone propionate have been used for some time, whereas ciclesonide is relatively new. Ciclesonide [Alvesco (Altana)] is included in the scope issued by NICE with the expectation that it may receive an extension to its marketing authorisation to include children under the age of 12 years within the time frame for the appraisal. There are a variety of delivery systems including pressurised metered-dose inhalers (pMDI), breath-activated pMDIs, dry powered formulations and nebulisers. Chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) have been the traditional propellant in pMDIs, but with the phasing out of CFCs they are being replaced by ozone-friendly hydrofluoroalkanes (HFAs). Spacer chambers can be attached to pMDIs to make them easier to use and improve drug delivery to the lungs.

Standard daily recommended doses of ICS in children are 100 micrograms (µg) twice daily for budesonide and beclometasone dipropionate and 50 µg twice daily for fluticasone propionate.[P6] The BTS recommends titrating to the lowest dose at which effective control is maintained.[P5,P7] In children this can be up to 400 µg/day (for budesonide or beclometasone dipropionate).[P5] Fluticasone is considered clinically equivalent to budesonide or beclometasone dipropionate at half the dose (however, HFA-propelled beclometasone dipropionate is regarded as clinically equivalent to fluticasone at the same dose).

If maintenance therapy with an ICS does not adequately control symptoms, there are a number of potential treatment options. One is to continue with the ICS but to increase the dose to the higher end of the recommended range (e.g. up to 400 µg in children aged 5–12 years or 200 µg in children younger than 5 years). However, this increases the risk of adverse effects (such as growth and adrenal suppression). An alternative is to add a LABA to ICS (but not in children younger than 4 years old). Adding a LABA may be preferential as results of dose–response studies suggest that higher doses of ICS may worsen the overall therapeutic ratio (that is, the ratio of the

maximally tolerated dose of a drug to the minimally curative or effective dose).[P8]

4.2.2. Long-acting beta$_2$ agonists (LABA)
Two LABAs are licensed for use in the UK, salmeterol (Serevent) and formoterol (Foradil; Oxis). Like short-acting beta$_2$ agonists, LABAs have a bronchodilatory action, expanding the bronchial airways to improve the passage of air. They are recommended in addition to existing inhaled corticosteroid therapy, rather than replacing it. They can be used in combination with inhaled corticosteroids in separate inhalers or combined in one inhaler. There are two licensed combination inhalers in the UK:

- budesonide + formoterol fumarate (Symbicort)
- fluticasone propionate + salmeterol (as xinafoate) (Seretide).

Budesonide and formoterol fumarate can be used only in children aged over 6 years, whereas fluticasone propionate and salmeterol can be used in children as young as 4 years old. The two LABAs differ chemically, with formoterol associated with a more rapid onset of action.

A typical dose of fluticasone propionate/salmeterol in children over 4 years old is 100/50 µg/day, titrated up to 200/100 µg/day if necessary.
A typical dose of budesonide/formoterol in children over 6 years old is 80/4.5 µg once daily, titrated up to 320/18 µg/day in severe cases.

Given the vast range of options available in the pharmacological management of chronic asthma, an assessment of clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the various strategies is required. Specifically, an assessment is needed of the relative benefits and adverse effects of the different ICS, and of the two ICS and LABA combination inhalers. It is also necessary to assess the benefits and adverse effects of combined treatment with an ICS and a LABA compared with continuing ICS alone (including increasing the dose of the ICS) in situations of worsening asthma control.

5. Report methods for synthesis of evidence of clinical effectiveness

5.1. Search strategy

- A search strategy will be devised and tested by an experienced information scientist. The strategy will be designed to identify two different types of study: (1) studies reporting the clinical effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists; and (2) studies reporting the cost-effectiveness of inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists. The draft search strategy for MEDLINE is given in Appendix 9.3.
- A number of electronic databases will be searched, including: The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR); The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials; NHS CRD (University of York) Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness (DARE) and the NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED); MEDLINE (Ovid); EMBASE (Ovid); National Research Register; Current Controlled Trials; ISI Proceedings; Web of Science; and BIOSIS. Bibliographies of related papers will be assessed for relevant studies where possible.
- The manufacturers' submissions to NICE will be assessed for any additional studies.
- Experts will be contacted to identify additional published and unpublished references.
- Searches will be carried out from the inception date of the database until February/March 2006 (for clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness studies). All searches will be limited to the English language. The searches will be updated around October 2006.
- Searches for other evidence to inform cost-effectiveness modelling will be conducted as required (see Section 6.5.2).

5.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

5.2.1. Intervention
Studies reporting evaluations of the following inhaled corticosteroids will be included:

- beclometasone dipropionate
- budesonide
- ciclesonide (subject to licensing)
- fluticasone propionate.

Studies reporting evaluations of the following inhaled corticosteroids combined with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists in the same inhaler (i.e. combination inhalers) will be included:

- budesonide + formoterol fumarate (in children aged 6 years and over)
- fluticasone propionate + salmeterol (as xinafoate) (in children aged 4 years and over).

Studies reporting treatment duration of 4 weeks or less will not be included.

5.2.2. Comparators

- The inhaled corticosteroids will be compared with each other.
- The combination inhalers will be compared with each other and with inhaled corticosteroids

only. They will also be compared with inhaled corticosteroids and long-acting beta$_2$ agonists administered separately in terms of any adverse events likely to impact on costs and cost effectiveness.
- Studies testing different doses of the same agent or the same agent delivered by different inhaler devices will not be included.

5.2.3. Types of studies
- Fully published randomised controlled trials (RCTs) or systematic reviews of RCTs. Double blinding is not a prerequisite for inclusion, although blinding will be assessed as part of critical appraisal (see Section 5.3). Indicators of a 'systematic' review include an explicit search strategy and inclusion/exclusion criteria.
- Studies published as abstracts or conference presentations from 2004 onwards will be included in the primary analysis of clinical and cost-effectiveness only if sufficient details are presented to allow an appraisal of the methodology and assessment of results.

5.2.4. Population
- Children aged under 12 years with chronic asthma. Studies in which the patient group is asthmatics with a specific related co-morbidity (e.g. cystic fibrosis) will not be included.
- Where data are available, clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness will be reported for patient subgroups, in terms of disease severity and age. Concordance according to different patient sub-groups will be assessed where data allow.
- Studies reporting the treatment of acute exacerbations of asthma will not be included.

5.2.5. Outcomes
- Studies reporting one or more of the following outcomes will be included:
  - objective measures of lung function (e.g. FEV_1, PEF)
  - symptom-free days and nights
  - incidence of mild and severe acute exacerbations (e.g. mild – requiring unscheduled contact with healthcare professional; severe – requiring hospitalisation, short-term 'rescue' use of systemic corticosteroids or visit to accident and emergency department)
  - adverse effects of treatment (e.g. growth suppression)
  - health-related quality of life
  - mortality.
- Titles and abstracts of studies identified by searching will be screened by one reviewer based on the above inclusion/exclusion criteria. A second reviewer will check a random 10% of these with any discrepancies resolved through discussion and involvement of a third reviewer where necessary.
- Full papers of studies which appear potentially relevant on title or abstract will be requested for further assessment. All full papers will be screened independently by one reviewer and checked by a second, and a final decision regarding inclusion will be agreed. Any discrepancy will be resolved by discussion with involvement of a third reviewer where necessary.

5.3. Critical appraisal and data extraction
- A number of recently updated Cochrane systematic reviews of the effectiveness of comparisons of ICS[P9–P11] and ICS with LABA[P12] have been published. Where possible, these and other high-quality systematic reviews will be used to assess clinical effectiveness. RCTs published since the reviews were last updated would be prioritised for full data extraction and critical appraisal. The findings of the systematic reviews and the supplemental RCTs will be used together to inform the assessment of clinical effectiveness.
- Data extraction and critical appraisal will be performed by one reviewer using a standardised data extraction form (see Appendix 9.4). A second reviewer will check the form for accuracy and completeness. Discrepancies will be resolved by discussion, with involvement of a third reviewer where necessary.
- The quality of included RCTs and systematic reviews will be assessed using NHS CRD (University of York) criteria[P13] (see Appendix 9.5).

5.4. Methods of analysis/synthesis
- Clinical effectiveness studies will be synthesised through a narrative review with tabulation of results of included studies.
- Where data are of sufficient quantity, quality and homogeneity, a meta-analysis of the clinical effectiveness studies will be performed, using appropriate software.
- To minimise clinical heterogeneity, the synthesis will seek to group together studies reporting similar populations and interventions.
  - For example, comparisons of different ICS delivered via pMDI may be considered separately to those comparing different ICS delivered by dry powder formulations.
  - Similarly, comparisons of ICS where a CFC-propelled pMDI is used may be grouped separately to those where the propellant is HFA, given suggested differences in potency.[P11]

– Dose equivalence will need to be taken into account as far as the evidence allows, particularly where a study compares a CFC pMDI ICS with an HFA pMDI ICS.

6. Methods for synthesising evidence of cost-effectiveness

6.1. Search strategy

Refer to Appendix 9.3 for details of the draft search strategy for MEDLINE. The sources to be searched are similar to those used in the clinical effectiveness review (see Section 5.1). All searches will be limited to the English language.

6.2. Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the systematic review of economic evaluations will be identical with those for the systematic review of clinical effectiveness, except that:

- Non-randomised studies may be included (e.g. decision model based analyses or analyses of patient-level cost and effectiveness data alongside observational studies).
- Full cost-effectiveness analyses, cost–utility analyses, cost–benefit analyses and cost–consequence analyses will be included. (Economic evaluations which only report average cost-effectiveness ratios will only be included if the incremental ratios can be easily calculated from the published data.)

Based on the above inclusion/exclusion criteria, study selection will be made independently by two reviewers. Discrepancies will be resolved by discussion, with involvement of a third reviewer when necessary.

6.3. Study quality assessment

The methodological quality of the economic evaluations will be assessed using accepted frameworks such as the international consensus-developed list of criteria developed by Evers and colleagues[P4] and Drummond and colleagues.[P14] For any studies based on decision models we will also make use of the checklist for assessing good practice in decision analytic modelling of Philips and colleagues.[15] We will examine recent published studies which are carried out from the UK NHS and PSS perspective in more detail.

6.4. Data extraction strategy

Data will be extracted by one researcher into two summary tables: one to describe the study design of each economic evaluation and the other to describe the main results.

- The following data will be extracted into the study design table: author and year; model type or trial based; study design [e.g. cost-effectiveness analysis (CEA) or cost–utility analysis (CUA)]; service setting/country; study population; comparators; research question; perspective, time horizon and discounting; main costs included; main outcomes included; sensitivity analyses conducted; and other notable design features.
- For modelling-based economic evaluations a supplementary study design table will record further descriptions of model structure (and note its consistency with the study perspective, and knowledge of disease/treatment processes), sources of transition and chance node probabilities, sources of utility values, sources of resource use and unit costs, handling of heterogeneity in populations and evidence of validation (e.g. debugging, calibration against external data, comparison with other models).
- For each comparator in the study, the following data will be extracted into the results table: incremental cost; incremental effectiveness/utility and incremental cost-effectiveness ratio(s). Comparators excluded on the basis of dominance or extended dominance will also be noted. The original authors' conclusions will be noted, and also any issues they raise concerning the generalisability of results. Finally, the reviewers' comments on study quality or generalisability (in relation to the NICE scope) will be recorded.

6.5. Synthesis of evidence on costs and effectiveness

6.5.1. Published and submitted economic evaluations

Narrative synthesis, supported by the data extraction tables, will be used to summarise the evidence base from published economic evaluations and sponsor submissions to NICE.

6.5.2. Economic modelling

A new cost-effectiveness analysis will be carried out from the perspective of the UK NHS and PSS using a decision analytic model. The evaluation will be constrained by available evidence. If possible, the incremental cost-effectiveness of the intervention drug classes and the specified comparators will be estimated in terms of cost per quality-adjusted life-year (QALY) gained, as well as the cost per acute exacerbation avoided.

Model structure will be determined on the basis of research evidence and clinical expert opinion of:

- the biological disease process of chronic asthma in children (i.e. knowledge of the natural history of the disease)
- the main diagnostic and care pathways for patients in the UK NHS context [both with and without the intervention(s) of interest] and
- the disease states or events that are most important in determining patients' clinical outcomes, quality of life and consumption of NHS or PSS resources.

For example, we will need to consider developing a natural history model of chronic asthma which could reflect factors such as: patient age, asthma severity (e.g. FEV_1, PEF, frequency of acute exacerbations), whether their asthma is predominantly self-managed or GP/primary care nurse managed. The extent to which the model **is able to** reflect these various factors fully will depend on the available research literature. The extent to which the model **needs to** reflect these factors will depend on how plausible it is that they impact on either the effectiveness or cost impacts of the interventions.

Parameter values will be obtained from relevant research literature, including our own systematic review of clinical-effectiveness. Where required parameters are not available from good-quality published studies in the relevant patient group we may use data from sponsor submissions to NICE or expert clinical opinion. Sources for parameters will be stated clearly.

Resource use will be specified and valued from the perspective of the NHS and PSS in 2005 (this is the most recent year for which NHS National Schedule of Reference Cost data will be available). Cost data will be identified from NHS and PSS reference costs or, where these are not relevant, they will be extracted from published work or sponsor submissions to NICE as appropriate. If insufficient data are retrieved from published sources, costs may be obtained from individual NHS Trusts or groups of Trusts.

To capture health-related quality of life effects, utility values will be sought directly from the relevant research literature. Ideally utility values will be taken from studies that have been based on 'public' (as opposed to patient or clinician) preferences elicited using a choice-based method.

Analysis of uncertainty will focus on cost–utility, assuming the cost per QALY can be estimated. Uncertainty will be explored through one-way sensitivity analysis and, if the data and modelling approach permit, probabilistic sensitivity analysis (PSA). The outputs of PSA will be presented both using plots on the cost-effectiveness plane and cost-effectiveness acceptability curves.

The simulated population is likely to be separate birth cohorts of children aged between 2 and 11 years. Where possible, the base-case results will be presented separately for grouped age bands, at least for 2–4-year-olds and 5–11-year-olds. The time horizon for our analysis will be between 1 and 5 years, sufficiently long to reflect both the chronic nature of the disease and estimate differences in rare outcomes, such as asthma-related deaths.

Searches for additional information regarding model parameters, patient preferences and other topics not covered within the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness reviews will be conducted as required (e.g. health-related quality of life, epidemiology and natural history). This is in accordance with the methodological discussion paper produced by InterTASC in January 2005.

7. Handling the company submission(s)

All information submitted by the manufacturers/sponsors as part of the NICE appraisal process will be considered if received by the TAR team no later than 2 August 2006. Information arriving after this date will not be considered.

Economic evaluations included in sponsors' submission will be assessed against the NICE guidance for the Methods of Technology Appraisals[220] and will also be assessed for clinical validity, reasonableness of assumptions and appropriateness of the data used.

Incremental cost-effectiveness ratios (ICERs) estimated from consultee models will be compared with results from the Assessment Group's analysis, and reasons for large discrepancies in estimated ICERs will be explored and, where possible, explained.

Any 'commercial-in-confidence' data taken from a company submission will be underlined and highlighted in the assessment report (followed by an indication of the relevant company name, e.g. in brackets).

8. Competing interests of authors

There are no competing interests.

9. Appendices

9.1. SIGN/BTS pharmacological management pathway for chronic asthma.

9.2. Inhaled steroids and devices.

9.3. MEDLINE search strategy.

9.4. Data extraction form (RCTs and systematic reviews).

9.5. Quality assessment criteria (RCTs and systematic reviews).

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Appendix 3

Search strategies and databases searched for the clinical and cost-effectiveness reviews

Clinical effectiveness search strategy: corticosteroids in asthma

The following databases were searched:
The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)
The Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials
CRD (University of York) Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effectiveness (DARE), NHS Economic Evaluation Database (NHS EED)
MEDLINE (Ovid)
EMBASE (Ovid)
National Research Register
Current Controlled Trials
Web of Knowledge Science Citation Index and ISI Proceedings
BIOSIS

Ovid MEDLINE 1966–2006. Run on 15 February 2006; update search run on 26 September 2006:

1 exp asthma/
2 asthma.ti,ab.
3 1 or 2
4 exp randomized controlled trials/
5 exp random allocation/
6 controlled clinical trials/
7 randomized controlled trial.pt.
8 controlled clinical trial.pt.
9 exp double blind method/
10 exp single blind method/
11 (randomiz$ or randomis$).
12 placebo.ti,ab.
13 (singl$ or doubl$ or tripl$ or trebl$ or blind$).ti,ab.
14 (trial$ or study or studies or method$).ti,ab.
15 13 or 14
16 meta analysis/
17 (meta analys?s or metaanalys?s).ab,pt,ti.
18 (systematic$ adj2 (review$ or overview$)).ti,ab.
19 or/16-18 28348
20 or/4-12,15,19
21 (letter or editorial or comment).pt.
22 20 not 21
23 3 and 22
24 beclomethasone/
25 bdp.ti,ab.
26 budesonide/
27 (beclomet?asone or budesonide or ciclesonide or fluticasone or mometasone).mp.
28 (asmabec or belclazone or cyclocaps or becodisks or becotide or filair or qvar or pulvinal or pulmicort or flixotide or aerobec or becloforte or novoliser or viatris or alvesco or asmanex or novolizer or easyhaler or symbicort or seretide or serevent or atimos or foradil).mp.
29 exp glucocorticoids/
30 (corticosteroid$ or glucocorticoid$ or steriod$).ti,ab.
31 or/24-30
32 31 not 21
33 23 and 32
34 limit 33 to (humans and english language)
35 or/24-28
36 35 not 21
37 23 and 36
38 limit 37 to (humans and english language)

Cost-effectiveness search strategy: corticosteroids in asthma

The search strategy was translated and run in:
MEDLINE (Ovid)
MEDLINE in Process (Ovid)
EMBASE (Ovid)
Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews (CDSR)
Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CCTR)
Science Citation Index (Web of Knowledge)
CRD NHS Economic Evaluation Database, DARE and HTA databases and EconLit.

Ovid MEDLINE 1966 to March Week 1 2006. Searched on 9 March 2006; update search on 6 October 2006:

1 exp Asthma/)
2 asthma.ti,ab
3 1 or 2

4 exp ECONOMICS/
5 exp ECONOMICS, HOSPITAL/
6 exp ECONOMICS, PHARMACEUTICAL/
7 exp ECONOMICS, NURSING/
8 exp ECONOMICS, DENTAL/
9 exp ECONOMICS, MEDICAL/
10 exp "Costs and Cost Analysis"/
11 Cost-Benefit Analysis/
12 VALUE OF LIFE/
13 exp MODELS, ECONOMIC/
14 exp FEES/ and CHARGES/
15 exp BUDGETS/
16 (economic$ or price$ or pricing or financ$ or fee$ or pharmacoeconomic$ or pharma economic$).tw.
17 (cost$ or costly or costing$ or costed).tw.
18 (cost$ adj2 (benefit$ or utilit$ or minim$ or effective$)).tw.
19 (expenditure$ not energy).tw.
20 (value adj2 (money or monetary)).tw.
21 budget$.tw.
22 (economic adj2 burden).tw.
23 "resource use".ti,ab.
24 or/4-22
25 news.pt.
26 letter.pt.
27 editorial.pt.
28 comment.pt.
29 or/25-28
30 24 not 29
31 3 and 30
32 Beclomethasone/
33 budesonide/
34 bdp.ti,ab.
35 (beclometasone or beclomethasone or budesonide or ciclesonide or fluticasone or mometasone).mp.
36 (pulmicort or flixotide or asmanex or novoliser or becotide or asmabec or belclazone or cyclocaps or becodisks or filair or qvar or pulvinal or aerobec or becloforte or viatris or alvesco).mp.
37 32 or 33 or 34 or 35 or 36
38 31 and 37
39 limit 38 to (humans and english language)

Quality of life search strategy: asthma in adults and children

This search strategy was translated and run in:
MEDLINE (Ovid)
MEDLINE in Process (Ovid)
EMBASE
Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews and Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials (CDSR and CCTR)

Ovid MEDLINE 1966 to May Week 1 2006.
Searched on 11 May 2006; update search run on 6 October 2006:

1 exp Asthma/
2 asthma.ti,ab.
3 1 or 2
4 value of life/
5 quality adjusted life year/
6 quality adjusted life.ti,ab.
7 (qaly$ or qald$ or qale$ or qtime$).ti,ab.
8 disability adjusted life.ti,ab.
9 daly$.ti,ab.
10 health status indicators/
11 (sf36 or sf 36 or short form 36 or shortform 36 or sf thirtysix or sf thirty six or shortform thirstysix or shortform thirty six or short form thirty six or short form thirtysix or short form thirty six).ti,ab.
12 (sf6 or sf 6 or short form 6 or shortform 6 or sf six or sfsix or shortform six or short form six).ti,ab.
13 (sf12 or sf 12 or short form 12 or shortform 12 or sf twelve of sftwelve or shortform twelve or short form twelve).ti,ab.
14 (sf16 or sf 16 or short form 16 or shortform 16 or sf sixteen or sfsixteen or shortform sixteen or short form sixteen).ti,ab.
15 (sf20 or sf 20 or short form 20 or shortform 20 or sf twenty or sftwenty or shortform twenty or short form twenty).ti,ab.
16 (euroqol or euro qol or eq5d or eq 5d).ti,ab.
17 (hql or hqol or h qol or hrqol or hr qol).ti,ab.
18 (ACQ or asthma control questionnaire$).ti,ab.
19 (AQLQ or asthma quality of life questionnaire$).ti,ab.
20 (SGRQ or (St George$ adj5 Respiratory Questionnaire$)).ti,ab.
21 (hye or hyes).ti,ab.
22 health$ year$ equivalent$.ti,ab.
23 health utilit$.ab.
24 (hui or hui1 or hui2 or hui3).ti,ab.
25 disutil$.ti,ab.
26 rosser.ti,ab.
27 quality of well being.ti,ab.
28 quality of wellbeing.ti,ab.
29 qwb.ti,ab.
30 willingness to pay.ti,ab.
31 standard gamble$.ti,ab.
32 time trade off.ti,ab.
33 time tradeoff.ti,ab.
34 tto.ti,ab. (221)
35 (index adj2 well being).mp.
36 (quality adj2 well being).mp.
37 (health adj3 utilit$ ind$).mp. [mp=title, original title, abstract, name of substance word, subject heading word]

38 ((multiattribute$ or multi attribute$) adj3 (health ind$ or theor$ or health state$ or utilit$ or analys$)).mp.
39 quality adjusted life year$.mp.
40 (15D or 15 dimension$).mp.
41 (12D or 12 dimension$).mp.
42 rating scale$.mp.
43 linear scal$.mp.
44 linear analog$.mp.
45 visual analog$.mp.
46 (categor$ adj2 scal$).mp.
47 or/4-46
48 (letter or editorial or comment).pt.
49 47 not 48
50 3 and 49
51 limit 50 to english language

Adverse events searches: corticosteroids for asthma

This search strategy was translated and run in:
MEDLINE (Ovid)
MEDLINE in Process (Ovid)
EMBASE
Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews
Cochrane Central Register of Controlled Trials and DARE.

Database: Ovid MEDLINE 1966 to May Week 3 2006. Searched 26 May 2006:

1 exp Asthma/
2 asthma.ti,ab.
3 1 or 2
4 (beclometasone or beclomethasone or budesonide or ciclesonide or fluticasone or mometasone).mp.
5 (pulmicort or flixotide or asmanex or novoliser or becotide or asmabec or belclazone or cyclocaps or becodisks or filair or qvar or pulvinal or aerobec or becloforte or viatris or alvesco).mp.
6 Beclomethasone/ae, po, to
7 budesonide/ae, po, to
8 Adrenal Cortex Hormones/ad, ae, po, to [Administration & Dosage, Adverse Effects, Poisoning, Toxicity]
9 exp *Pregnenediones/ae, to [Adverse Effects, Toxicity]
10 steroid$.ti,ab.
11 (inhal$ or oral).ti,ab.
12 (toxicity or poisoning or adverse effects).fs.
13 10 and 11 and 12
14 4 and 12
15 5 and 12
16 6 or 7 or 8 or 9 or 13 or 14 or 15 (
17 (safe or safety).ti,ab.
18 side effect$.ti,ab.
19 tolerability.ti,ab.
20 toxicity.ti,ab.
21 (adverse adj3 (effect or effects or reaction or reactions or event or events or outcome or outcomes or consequence$)).ti,ab.
22 exp Dose-Response Relationship, Drug/
23 17 or 18 or 19 or 20 or 21 or 22
24 long term.ti,ab. (296250)
25 short term.ti,ab. (79427)
26 16 and 23 and 24 and 3
27 16 and 23 and 25 and 3

Healthcare resource use and asthma severity or symptom control searches

This search strategy was translated and run in Ovid MEDLINE, Ovid MEDLINE in Process and Ovid EMBASE.

Ovid MEDLINE 1966 to July Week 4 2006. Searched 2 August 2006:

1 "healthcare resource use".mp.
2 exp Health Care Costs/
3 economics/ or exp resource allocation/
4 hcru.ab,ti.
5 health care utilisation.mp
6 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 or 5
7 "Anti-Asthmatic Agents"/
8 Asthma/
9 asthma$.ti,ab.
10 Asthma, Exercise-Induced/
11 7 or 8 or 9 or 10
12 "Drug Administration Schedule"/
13 "Needs Assessment"/
14 "Severity of Illness Index"/
15 (severe$ or severity).ti,ab.
16 (symptom$ adj3 control$).mp
17 (asthma adj3 control$).mp
18 exp disease management/
16 or/12-18
17 6 and 11 and 16

Appendix 4

Systematic review of clinical effectiveness: data extraction and quality assessment forms

Study	Treatment	Participants	Outcomes
Ref.: 204 **Author:** Altintas *et al*. **Year:** 2005 **Country:** Turkey **Study design:** Randomised trial **Number of centres:** 1 **Funding:** Not reported	***Random groups*** **Group A:** *n* = 15 Drug(s): BUD Dose: 400 μg/day Delivery: inhalation Duration: 1 year **Group B:** *n* = 15 Drug(s): FP Dose: 250 μg/day Delivery: inhalation Duration: 1 year ***A third control group*** **Group C:** *n* = 30 Drug(s): NA Dose: NA Delivery: NA Duration: 1 year **Run-in period:** Duration: not reported ICS: not reported Relief: not reported **Additional treatment allowed:** Relief: not reported Other: not reported	**Number randomised:** 30 **Sample attrition/drop-out:** Not reported **Sample cross-overs:** Not reported **Inclusion/exclusion criteria:** • Not reported. The study sample was children with moderate asthma who were followed up by the investigators. (Asthma was diagnosed according to guidelines for the diagnosis and management of asthma from the National Institutes of Health, National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute) **Baseline characteristics:** *Summarising groups A and B, without including the third group C* • Age: mean (range) = 10.1 (6–13) years • Male:female = 17:13 • Symptom score = 5.6 (0.5) • Pulmonary functions: mean (SE or SD) – VC = 66.6 (8.7) – PEF = 62.4 (5.5) – FEV_1 = 60.0 (9.4) • Bone metabolism: mean – calcium (mg/dl) = 9.55 – phosphorus (mg/dl) = 4.35 – ALP (IU/l) = 468.5 – BMD (g/cm^2) = 0.615	**Primary measure:** • Anthropometric measurements – body mass index – linear growth – growth rate • Symptom score • Pulmonary functions – FVC – PEF – FEV_1 **Secondary measures:** • Bone metabolism – serum calcium – serum phosphorus – serum ALP – BMD • Adrenal functions (basal serum cortisol level) **Method of assessing outcomes:** Not reported **Length of follow-up:** 1 year

continued

Results

Outcomes[a]	**Group A (*n* = 15)**	**Group B (*n* = 15)**	***p*-Value**
FEV_1, % predicted values for height and age: *assuming reported as mean (SD)*	82.8 (10.0)	82.8 (10.0)	NA
PEF, % predicted values for height and age: *assuming reported as mean (SD)*	82.5 (14.3)	82.5 (14.3)	NA
SFDs			
Nocturnal awakenings			
Acute exacerbations			
Use of systemic corticosteroids			
Use of reliever medication			
Mortality			
QoL			
AEs – *n* (%)[b]			
Other[c]			
FVC, % predicted values for height and age: *assuming reported as mean (SD)*	85.3 (10.7)	85.3 (10.7)	NA
Symptom score: mean (SE or SD)	4.2 (0.4)	4.2 (0.4)	NA

[a] It looks incorrect as the symptom score and pulmonary functions before and after therapy for the two groups are identical including the SE/SD; the outcome extracted are at the end-point (after treatment).

[b] Reported that the study did not observe any side-effects of ICs, and the study found that long term ICS treatment did not cause any serious side-effects in children.

[c] Body mass index and weight percentiles did not change after one year in all groups ($p > 0.05$). The mean increase in linear growth from the beginning to the first year of the therapy was statistically significant and similar in all groups ($p < 0.05$). Growth rate (cm in 1 year) was 8.4 ± 4.6 cm (95% CI 6.07 to 10.73) in group A and 8.2 ± 6.2 (95% CI 5.06 to 11.34) in group B *(95% CIs were calculated by the reviewers assuming the reported values were presented as mean ± SD). Outcomes which are not relevant to the review protocol are not extracted*.

Methodological comments

- **Allocation to treatment groups:** reported as randomised trial, but no further details about randomisation and allocation
- **Blinding:** not reported
- **Comparability of treatment groups:** symptom score and pulmonary functions (VC, PEF and FEV_1) at baseline are identical including SE or SD
- **Method of data analysis:** used SPSS program for all statistical analysis. Analysis was performed by Mann–Whitney *U* and Wilcoxon tests. A *p*-value <0.05 was considered significant
- **Sample size/power calculation:** not reported
- **Attrition/drop-out:** not reported

General comments

- **Generalisability:** applicable to children with moderate asthma, but not very clear as inclusion and exclusion criteria were not reported
- **Outcome measures:** appropriate and objective
- **Inter-centre variability:** NA
- **Conflict of interests:** unknown

Quality criteria for assessment of experimental studies

1. Was the assignment to the treatment groups really random?	Inadequate
2. Was the treatment allocation concealed?	Inadequate
3. Were the groups similar at baseline in terms of prognostic factors?	Inadequate (appears to be an error)
4. Were outcome assessors blinded to the treatment allocation?	Inadequate
5. Was the care provider blinded?	Inadequate
6. Was the patient blinded?	Inadequate
7. Were the point estimates and measure of variability presented for the primary outcome measure?	Adequate
8. Did the analyses include an ITT analysis?	Unknown
9. Were withdrawals and drop-outs completely described?	Inadequate

ALP, alkaline phosphatase; FVC, forced vital capacity; NA, not applicable; QoL, quality of life; VC, velocity capacity.
From: NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination. *Undertaking systematic reviews of research on effectiveness: guidance for those carrying out or commissioning reviews* (Report 4). URL: http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/report4.htm.

Study	Treatment	Participants	Outcomes
Ref.: 214 **Author:** Malone *et al*. **Year:** 2005 **Country:** USA and Canada **Study design:** Randomised, multi-centre, double-blind, active-controlled, parallel-group **Number of centres:** 79 **Funding:** GSK	**Group A:** *n* = 101 Drug(s): FP/SAL Dose: 100/50 μg b.d. Delivery: Advair Diskus Duration: 12 weeks **Group B:** *n* = 102 Drug(s): FP Dose: 100 μg b.d. Delivery: Flovent Diskus Duration: 12 weeks **Run-in period:** Duration: 2 weeks ICS: baseline ICS was continued Relief: albuterol metered-dose inhaler for rescue use **Additional treatment allowed:** Relief: albuterol Other: not reported/unknown. (Oral or parenteral corticosteroids, cromolyn, nedocromil, or LABA were prohibited throughout the study. Also, the use of medications that could affect the course of asthma or interact with study medications, such as anticholinergics, anticonvulsants, or β-adrenergic blockers, was prohibited throughout the study)	**Number randomised:** 203 **Sample attrition/drop-out:** 35 withdrawals; 19 (19%) were from group A and 16 (16%) from group B. 7 of the 35 (2 vs 5) were due to worsening asthma **Sample cross-overs:** No **Inclusion criteria:** For screening: • Age 4–11 years with asthma (defined by the American Thoracic Society criteria) • History of asthma ⩾2 months • Were receiving ICS (BDP 252–336 μg; triamcinolone acetonide 600–1000 μg; flunisolide 1000 μg; FP 88–250 μg; or BUD 200–400 μg, daily) at a consistent dose for ⩾1 month before screening • FEV_1 50–95% of the predicted for aged 6–11 years • PEF 50–95% of the predicted for aged 4–5 years • An increase in FEV_1 (for aged 6–11 years) or morning PEF (for aged 4–5 years) of ⩾12% within 30 minutes of inhalation of 2–4 actuations of albuterol (180–360 μg) or to have a historical documentation of ⩾12% reversibility within the previous year **For randomisation:** • A morning FEV_1 50–95% of the predicted for aged 6–11 years or a morning PEF 50–95% of the predicted for aged 4–5 years • A daytime asthma symptom score of ⩾1 (on a scale from 0 to 5) on ⩾3 days or the use of albuterol on ⩾3 days during the 7 days before the randomisation visit • Adequate compliance, defined as ⩾70% compliance with diary card completion **Exclusion criteria:** • A history of life-threatening asthma • Hospitalisation due to asthma ⩾2 times in the previous year • A significant concurrent disease (e.g. cystic fibrosis, malignancy or immunological compromise) • Recent upper or lower respiratory tract infection • Current chickenpox or recent exposure to chickenpox in a non-immune patient • Severe milk protein allergy • Hypersensitivity to $beta_2$ agonist, sympathomimetic or corticosteroid therapy • Clinically significant abnormal laboratory test results • A history or present use of tobacco	**Primary measure:** AEs **Secondary measures:** • Asthma exacerbations or worsening asthma • 2-hour serial post-dose FEV_1 (for aged 6–11 years) or 2-hour serial post-dose PEF (for aged 4–5 years) after the first dose of study medication on treatment day 1 • FEV_1 (for aged 6–11 years) • PEF (morning and evening) • Daytime asthma scores • 24-hour albuterol use **Method of assessing outcomes:** • Clinic visit after 1, 2, 4, 8 and 12 weeks of treatment • Investigators were responsible for the detection, documentation, intensity evaluation and causality evaluation of all AEs • Parents or guardians' diary: – PEF morning and evening (measured before taking a dose of study medication or albuterol) – use of albuterol – daytime asthma symptom scores: 0 (no symptoms) to 5 (severe symptoms that prevented normal daily activities) **Length of follow-up:** 12 weeks

continued

Study	Treatment	Participants	Outcomes
		• A history or current presence of glaucoma or posterior subcapsular cataracts • Not to have used oral or parenteral corticosteroids for ⩾1 month before screening, cromolyn or nedocromil for ⩾1 week before screening, or LABA within 48 hours of screening **Baseline characteristics:** • Age, mean = 8.05 years – % 4–5 years = 20 – % 6–11 years = 80 • Male:female = 127:73 • White:black:other = 70:19:11 • Duration of asthma, mean = 5.2 years • Aged 6–11 years – FEV_1 = 1.68 litres – FEV_1, mean, % predicted = 80.45 – FEV_1, mean, % reversibility = 19.3 – historical reversibility, %[a] = 46 • Aged 4–5 years – PEF = 142.5 l/minute – PEF, mean, % predicted = 86.65 – PEF mean, % reversibility = 27.9 – historical reversibility, %[a] = 20 • Run-in ICS regimen, patients/daily mean dose[b] – FP = 129/166.5 μg – BUD = 45/380 μg – BDP HFA = 2/240 μg – BDP = 1/ 252 μg – triamcinolone acetonide = 3/550 μg	

[a] Evaluated at screening.
[b] The total daily dose of ICS was calculated in 93 patients in group A and 89 patients in group B.

Results

Outcomes	Group A (*n* = 101)	Group B (*n* = 102)	*p*-Value
FEV_1, (litres) (for aged 6–11 years) at 12 weeks[a]	1.88 (*n* = 80 in this age group)	1.77 (*n* = 83 in this age group)	
Morning PEF (l/minute), mean (SE) change from baseline[b]	21.5 (±2.79)	16.9 (±2.85)	
Evening PEF (l/minute), mean (SE) change from baseline[b]	21.5 (±2.43)	15.1 (±2.83)	
Asthma symptom score, mean (SE) change from baseline[b]	–0.6 (±0.10)	–0.5 (±0.12)	
% SFDs, mean (SE) change from baseline[b]	24.4 (±4.10)	21.2 (±4.09)	
Nocturnal awakenings			
Acute exacerbations:			
• Patients with exacerbation occurred, *n* (%)	3 (3)	8 (8)	
• Withdrawal due to exacerbations, *n* (%)	2 (2)	5 (5)	
Use of systemic corticosteroids			
Use of reliever medication (puffs/24 hours), mean (SE) change from baseline[b]	–0.5 (±0.22)	–0.4 (±0.19)	
Mortality			
QoL			
AEs – *n* (%)[c]:			
• Any AE	60 (59)	58 (57)	
• Patients experienced at least 1 potentially study drug-related AE	13 (13)	9 (9)	

continued

Outcomes	Group A (*n* = 101)	Group B (*n* = 102)	*p*-Value
• Withdrawal due to AE	3 (3)	0 (0)	
• Patients with oropharyngeal candidiasis occurred	4 (4)	0 (0)	
Other[d]			

[a] Data taken from linked abstract.[215]
[b] Data taken from linked abstract.[216]
[c] Data on detailed types of AEs available in Table 2 in the paper.
[d] Not relevant.

Methodological comments

- **Allocation to treatment groups:** randomised allocation, but no further details
- **Blinding:** double-blind (the cardiologists accessing ECGs were blinded to treatment assignment)
- **Comparability of treatment groups:** reported as comparable at baseline with respect to patient demographics and pulmonary function
- **Method of data analysis:** only that it was analysed on an ITT basis was reported
- **Sample size/power calculation:** no power calculations were performed (because it was a safety study), but estimated that approximately 100 patients in each treatment arm were sufficient to evaluate the safety of the treatment for group A compared with the treatment for group B.
- **Attrition/drop-out:** 35 withdrawals; 19 (19%) were from group A and 16 (16%) from group B. 7 of the 35 (2 vs 5) were due to worsening asthma. ITT population (defined as all patients who were randomised and received at least one dose of study drug) was used for all demographic and safety measures except for cortisol excretion

General comments

- **Generalisability:** relatively inclusive criteria; not applicable to ICS-naïve patients
- **Outcome measures:** appropriate and objective
- **Inter-centre variability:** not reported; unclear whether randomisation was stratified by centre
- **Conflict of interests:** study supported and 4 authors from GSK

Quality criteria for assessment of experimental studies

1. Was the assignment to the treatment groups really random?	Unknown
2. Was the treatment allocation concealed?	Unknown
3. Were the groups similar at baseline in terms of prognostic factors?	Reported
4. Were outcome assessors blinded to the treatment allocation?	Unknown
5. Was the care provider blinded?	Adequate
6. Was the patient blinded?	Adequate
7. Were the point estimates and measure of variability presented for the primary outcome measure?	Adequate
8. Did the analyses include an ITT analysis?	Adequate
9. Were withdrawals and drop-outs completely described?	Adequate

From: NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination. *Undertaking systematic reviews of research on effectiveness: guidance for those carrying out or commissioning reviews* (Report 4). URL: http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/report4.htm.

Study	Treatment	Participants	Outcomes
Ref.: 198 **Author:** O'Byrne *et al*. **Year:** 2005 **Country:** International (22 countries) **Study design:** Randomised, parallel group, double-blind **Number of centres:** 246 **Funding:** AZ (Lund, Sweden)	**Group A:** *n* = 925 Drug(s): BUD/FF Dose: 80/4.5 μg b.d. as needed Children given half dose Delivery: Turbuhaler Duration: 52 weeks **Group B:** *n* = 909 Drug(s): BUD/FF Dose: 80/4.5 μg b.d. plus terbutaline 0.4 mg as needed Children given half dose Delivery: Turbuhaler Duration: 52 weeks **Group C:** *n* = 926 Drug(s): BUD Dose: 320 μg b.d. plus terbutaline 0.4 mg as needed Children given half dose Delivery: Turbuhaler Duration: 52 weeks **Run-in period:** Duration: 14–18 days ICS: as previously prescribed Relief: terbutaline **Additional treatment allowed:** Nasal glucocorticoids; antihistamines (except terfenadin); disodium cromoglycate and/or nasal nedocromil sodium; immunotherapy (at constant dose during 90 days pre-enrolment); other medication given at investigators' discretion. Severe exacerbations treated with 10 days of oral prednisone (30 μg/day)	**Number randomised:** 2760 **Sample attrition/drop-out:** *n* = 412 (67 AEs; 111 eligibility criteria not fulfilled; 47 lost to follow-up; 187 other) **Sample cross-overs:** Not reported **Inclusion criteria:** • Age ⩾4 years • ⩾1 exacerbations in previous year • Adults maintained on ICS 400–1000 μg/day and children maintained on 200–500 μg/day in previous year • Constant dose of ICS ⩾3 months • FEV_1 60–100% predicted • Reversibility: FEV_1 ⩾12 • For Rx ⩾12 inhalations for adults and/or ⩾8 for children during last 10 days of run-in. **Exclusion criteria:** • During run-in: • For Rx ⩾10 inhalations reliever medication on any one day (⩾7 for children) • Additional exacerbations **Baseline characteristics:** • Mean age (range) = 36 (4–79) years • Male:female = 1231:1529 • 4–11 years, *n* (%): 341 (12%) • Mean duration of asthma = 9 years (range: 0–69) • FEV_1 (litres): 2.12 (range: 0.62–4.50) • FEV_1 % predicted: 73 (range: 43–108) • FEV_1 % reversibility: 21 (range: 2–89%) • ICS dose at entry (μg/day): 598–620[a] • LABA use at entry (*n*): 250–258 (28%)[b] • Reliever use, number of inhalations/day: 1.69–1.74 (range: 0.0–9.4) • Reliever use, number of inhalations/night: 0.72 (range: 0–6.6) • Asthma symptom scale score (0–6): 1.5 (range: 0.0–6.0) • SFDs (%): 23.5 (range: 0.0–100) • Reliever-free days (%): 8.4 (range: 0.0–100) • Asthma control days (%): 5.6 (range: 0.0–90) • Awakenings (% of nights): 20.9 (range: 0.0–100)	**Primary measure:** Time to first severe exacerbation (defined as hospitalisation emergency room treatment; oral steroid treatment (or an increase in ICS and/or other additional treatment for children aged 4–11 years) or morning PEF ⩽70% of baseline on 2 consecutive days) **Secondary measures:** • PEF (morning and evening) • FEV_1 • Time to first mild exacerbation (defined as morning PEF ⩽80% of baseline, ⩾2 reliever inhalations/day above baseline or awakenings caused by asthma) • Asthma symptom scores (day/night) • Rescue medication use (day/night) • SFDs • Rescue medication-free days • Asthma control days • Nocturnal awakenings • Mild exacerbation days • Height (children only) • AEs **Method of assessing outcomes:** • Clinic assessments at beginning and end of run-in and 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 months – PEF (morning and evening) Min-Wright PEF meter • FEV_1 (spirometry at clinic visits) • Daily patient diaries (symptoms, awakenings, effects and extra medication) • Electrocardiogram, morning plasma cortisol, vital signs (at clinic visits) • Height measured using local procedures (before run-in, 6 and 12 months of treatment) **Length of follow-up:** None beyond 12-month treatment period

[a] Values = combination of metered and delivered doses.
[b] Includes combinations of ICS/LABA and LABA.

continued

Results

Outcomes	Group A (n = 925)	Group B (n = 909)	Group C (n = 926)	p-Value
FEV_1, mean[a] over 12-month treatment period	2.51	2.43	2.41	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; 0.09[d]
PEF (l/minute), mean[a] over 12-month treatment period				<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; <0.001[d]
Morning	355	346	339	
Evening	360	349	345	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; <0.001[d]
SFDs (%), mean[a] over 12-month treatment period	54	53	46	0.52[b]; <0.001[c]; <0.001[d]
Nocturnal awakenings (% of nights), mean[a] over 12-month treatment period	9	12	12	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; 0.60[d]
Severe exacerbations including PEF falls: patients with event (%)[e]	16	27	28	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; 0.74[d]
Severe exacerbations resulting in medical intervention: patients with event (%)[e]	11	21	19	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; 0.37[d]
Use of reliever (inhalations/day), mean over 12 months	0.73	0.84	1.03	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; <0.001[d]
Use of reliever (inhalations/night), mean over 12 months	0.28	0.37	0.43	<0.001[b]; <0.001[c]; 0.003[d]
Use of systemic corticosteroids (courses per patient)				
Children (4–11 years)	0.05	0.30	0.38	
Adults (12–80 years)	0.19	0.42	0.25	NR
Mortality	NR	NR	NR	
QoL	NR	NR	NR	
⩾1 AEs – n (%)	496 (54%)	475 (52%)	528 (57%)	0.58[b]; 0.99[c]; 0.03[d]
⩾1 serious AEs – n (%)	46 (5%)	62 (7%)	48 (5%)	
Pharyngitis – n (%)	88 (10%)	88 (10%)	86 (9%)	0.93[b]; 0.99[c]; 0.87[d]
Respiratory infection – n (%)	158 (17%)	144 (16%)	182 (20%)	0.49[b]; 0.15[c]; 0.03[d]
Rhinitis – n (%)	80 (9%)	72 (8%)	76 (8%)	0.61[b]; 0.80[c]; 0.86[d]
Bronchitis – n (%)	51 (6%)	61 (7%)	76 (8%)	0.29[b]; 0.02[c]; 0.25[d]
Sinusitis – n (%)	43 (5%)	39 (4%)	33 (4%)	0.74[b]; 0.29[c]; 0.47[d]
Headache – n (%)	31 (3%)	35 (4%)	42 (5%)	0.62[b]; 0.19[c]; 0.49[d]
Tremor – n (%)	20 (2%)	18 (2%)	19 (2%)	0.87[b]; 0.99[c]; 0.99[d]
Palpitation – n (%)	10 (1%)	11 (1%)	3 (<0.5%)	0.83[b]; 0.09[c]; 0.03[d]
Tachycardia – n (%)	5 (0.5%)	4 (<0.5%)	3 (<0.5%)	0.99[b]; 0.73[c]; 0.72[d]
Candidiasis – n (%)	9 (1%)	6 (1%)	10 (1%)	0.61[b]; 0.82[c]; 0.45[d]
Dysphonia – n (%)	11 (1%)	13 (1%)	12 (1%)	0.69[b]; 0.84[c]; 0.84[d]
Discontinuation due to respiratory events – n (%)	7 (1%)	15 (2%)	14 (2%)	0.80[b]; 0.13[c]; 0.85[d]
Other: asthma control days (%)[f]	45	44	37	0.64[b]; <0.001[c]; <0.001[c]

[a] Least squares mean from two-way ANOVA.
[b] Group A vs Group B.
[c] Group A vs Group C.
[d] Group B vs Group C.
[e] p-Values based on the instantaneous risk of experiencing at least one severe exacerbation (Cox proportional hazards model).
[f] Defined as a day with no symptoms (day or night), no awakenings caused by asthma and no as-needed medication use.

Comments

- Time to first medically managed severe exacerbation was significantly longer in the BUD/FF maintenance + relief group (group A) compared with the BUD/FF + SABA (group B) and BUD + SABA groups (group C); HR = 0.50 (95% CI 0.40 to 0.64) and 0.55 (95% CI 0.43 to 0.70), respectively.
- The RR of severe exacerbation requiring medical management was reduced by 53% for BUD/FF maintenance + relief compared with BUD/FF + SABA; HR = 0.47 (95% CI 0.39 to 0.57) and by 46% compared with BUD + SABA; HR = 0.54 (95% CI 0.44 to 0.66). The effect of using BUD/FF for maintenance + relief remained constant over time.

continued

- Symptom measures improved in all groups compared with baseline in requirement for reliever medication treatment and night-time awakenings
- No clinically important differences in ECG, haematology, clinical chemistry or urinalysis were observed between the treatment groups or over time
- Children in both the BUD/FF groups grew significantly more than those in the BUD + SABA group

Methodological comments

- A**llocation to treatment groups:** block randomisation by computer-generated list with treatment stratified by age group in an 8:1 ratio (adults:children)
- **Blinding:** double-blind with respect to treatment group; unclear whether the outcome assessors were blinded
- **Comparability of treatment groups:** the groups are reported to be comparable with regard to demographic and baseline disease characteristics. There appeared to be no baseline imbalance in patient characteristic across the treatment groups
- **Method of data analysis:** the primary efficacy analyses of time to first severe asthma exacerbation was described using Kaplan–Meier plots and a log-rank test, with analysis of instantaneous risk described using a Cox proportional hazards model. Total numbers of severe exacerbations were compared using a Poisson regression model, with adjustments for over-dispersion. Secondary efficacy end-points were evaluated by ANCOVA, with the baseline value as covariate and the mean daily data over the 12-month treatment period as the treatment mean. All hypothesis testing was two-sided, with *p*-values of <5% considered significant
- **Sample size/power calculation:** designed to have 80% power to detect a 23% reduction in exacerbation rate in any of the treatment groups
- **Attrition/drop-out:** all patients who received at least 1 dose of study medication were included in the ITT analysis (for both efficacy and safety). The attrition rate was 15%, with 4% of randomised patients failing to meet the criterion for as-needed medication during the run-in period. Reasons for discontinuations were AEs 2% ($n = 67$), eligibility criteria not fulfilled 4% ($n = 111$), lost to follow-up 2% ($n = 47$) and other (not specified) 7% ($n = 187$). The total *n* analysed for primary end-point and safety was 2753, with LOCF for missing data. LOCF was not undertaken for three patients in group A, one in group B and one in group C

General comments

- **Generalisability:** relatively inclusive eligibility criteria; not applicable to ICS-naïve populations or patients with mild asthma
- **Outcome measures:** appropriately defined and objective
- **Inter-centre variability:** not reported; unclear whether randomisation was stratified by centre and whether centre was analysed as a covariate in the ANOVA model
- **Conflict of interests:** study support and one author had received previous funding from AZ

Quality criteria for assessment of experimental studies

1. Was the assignment to the treatment groups really random?	Adequate
2. Was the treatment allocation concealed?	Unknown
3. Were the groups similar at baseline in terms of prognostic factors?	Reported
4. Were outcome assessors blinded to the treatment allocation?	Unknown
5. Was the care provider blinded?	Unknown
6. Was the patient blinded?	Unknown
7. Were the point estimates and measure of variability presented for the primary outcome measure?	Adequate
8. Did the analyses include an ITT analysis?	Partial
9. Were withdrawals and drop-outs completely described?	Partial

ANCOVA, analysis of covariance; ANOVA, analysis of variance; HR, hazard ratio; LOCF, last observation carried forward; NR, not reported.
From: NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination. *Undertaking systematic reviews of research on effectiveness: guidance for those carrying out or commissioning reviews* (Report 4). URL: http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/report4.htm.

Study	Treatment	Participants	Outcomes
Ref.: 218 **Author:** Van den Berg *et al*. **Year:** 2000 **Country:** 9 countries **Study design:** Randomised, double-blind, double-dummy, parallel-group design **Number of centres:** 35 **Funding:** Glaxo Wellcome Research and Development	**Group A:** *n* = 125 Drug(s): FP/SAL Dose: 100/50 µg b.d. Delivery: combination inhaler (dry power inhaler) Duration: 12 weeks **Group B:** *n* = 132 Drug(s): FP + SAL Dose: 100 + 50 µg b.d. Delivery: concurrent separate inhaler (dry power inhaler) Duration: 12 weeks **Run-in period:** Duration: 2 weeks ICS: continued to take their regular inhaled corticosteroid Relief: salbutamol inhaler as required **Additional treatment allowed:** Relief: salbutamol as required for symptomatic relief Other: any other concurrent medication provided the dose remained constant	**Number randomised:** 257 **Sample attrition/drop-out:** 10 (4%) with 5 (2%) in each group **Sample cross-overs:** Not reported **Inclusion criteria:** • Aged 4–11 years • Reversible airways obstruction • Remained symptomatic on ICS treatment alone (BDP, BUD or flunisolide at dose of 400–500 µg/day, or FP at a dose of 200–250 µg/day for at least 4 weeks before the start of the study run-in period) • A symptom score (day- and night-time) of ⩾1 on at least 4 of the last 7 consecutive days of the run-in period • A mean PEF (morning) over the 7 days that was 50–85% of the PEF measured 15 minutes after inhaled salbutamol (400 µg) • PEF ⩾50% of predicted normal **Exclusion criteria:** • Had changed asthma medication or had taken salmeterol or any other long-acting $beta_2$ agonists or oral $beta_2$ agonists in the 4 weeks before the start of the run-in period • Had a lower respiratory tract infection • Had taken oral, depot or parenteral corticosteroids during the 4 weeks before the run-in period • Had received ⩾2 courses of oral, depot or parenteral corticosteroids within 12 weeks of the run-in period • Had suffered an acute exacerbation of reversible airways obstruction requiring hospitalisation • Unable to use a mini-Wright peak flow meter • Had known hypersensitivity to inhaled corticosteroids, $beta_2$ agonists, or lactose • Had received any investigational drug within the previous month • Females who had reached menarche **Baseline characteristics:** • Mean age (range) = 7.6 (4–11) years – 4–5 years = 27 – 6–7 years = 34 – 8–11 years = 67.5 • Sex (male:female) = 151:106 • Mean duration of asthma – <1 years = 10.5 – 1–5 years = 72.5 – >5 years = 45.5 • Mean history of atopy, *n* = 84 • Mean clinic PEF (l/minute) – % predicted = 243 – reversibility, % =10 • Concurrent asthma medication (ketotifen), *n* = 1	**Primary measure:** • Mean PEF (morning and evening) **Secondary measures:** • FEV_1 • AEs **Method of assessing outcomes:** • Clinic assessment at beginning of the run-in and treatment periods, at 2, 4, 8 and 12 weeks during treatment, and 2 weeks after study treatment ended • FEV_1[a]: when possible at each clinic visit; highest of three readings on each occasion • Daily measurement on a diary card: – PEF (morning)[a]: highest of three readings on each occasion; measured with a mini-Wright peak flow meter and recorded – day- and night-time symptom scores – any use of salbutamol rescue medication • Compliance with treatment: calculated from the number of doses used divided by the expected use **Length of follow-up:** 14 weeks

[a] Measured before taking study medication or rescue salbutamol.

continued

Results

Outcomes	Group A (n = 125)	Group B (n = 132)	p-Value
FEV_1[a], (litres): adjusted mean change from baseline at week 12	0.21	0.13	0.052
PEF, (l/minute): adjusted mean change from baseline at week 12			
Morning[b]	33	28	0.103
Evening[c]	29	25	0.164
SFDs[d]			
Nocturnal awakenings			
Acute exacerbations			
Use of systemic corticosteroids			
Use of reliever medication[e]			
Mortality			
QoL			
AEs[f] – n (%): patients	13 (10)	6 (5)	
PEF (morning) predicted, %: adjusted mean change from baseline at week 12	15	13	0.361
Patients had a median symptom score of zero, n (%): mean change from baseline at endpoint			
Daytime	76 (61)	78 (59)	0.904
Night-time	97 (78)	100 (76)	0.799

[a] The difference between the two treatments was not significant at week 12 (–0.08 litres, 95% CI –0.14 to –0.01, $p = 0.05$) or at any other time points.
[b] The adjusted change in mean morning PEF between the two treatment groups at other time intervals was similar to that for weeks 1–12, except at week 2 there was a significant difference in favour of combination therapy (–9 l/minute, 95% CI –15 to –3, $p = 0.017$).
[c] The adjusted change in evening PEF for most other periods were similar to that for weeks 1–12, except at week 2 there was a significant difference in favour of combination therapy (–8 l/minute, 95% CI –13 to –2, $p = 0.027$).
[d] There was no significant difference between the two groups in median percentages of SFDs and SFNs during the 12 weeks.
[e] There was no significant difference between the two groups in rescue-free days and nights during the 12 weeks.
[f] Considered by investigator to be drug-related (*detailed AEs reported in Table 3 in the paper*).

Methodological comments

- **Allocation to treatment groups:** stated as randomised trial, but no details reported
- **Blinding:** double-blind with respect to the interventions
- **Comparability of treatment groups:** reported as the two treatment groups were similar with respect to demographic characteristics, history of asthma and baseline lung function
- **Method of data analysis:** treatment groups were defined as equivalent if the 95% CI for the difference between mean PEF (morning) during combination and concurrent therapy was within ±15 l/minute. All tests were carried out at the two-sided 5% level of significance. PEF and FEV_1 values were analysed using ANCOVA, adjusting for baseline, age, gender and country. Centres were grouped by country to avoid the effects of too few patients in any one centre. Symptom scores and use of rescue medication were analysed using the Van Elteren extension to the Wilcoxon rank sum test
- **Sample size/power calculation:** not reported
- **Attrition/drop-out:** 10 (4%) patients withdrew with 5 (4%) from each treatment group; 2 (2%) patients withdrew from each group due to AEs. Analyses were performed on an ITT basis

General comments

- **Generalisability:** relatively inclusive eligibility criteria; not applicable to ICS-naïve population
- **Outcome measures:** appropriate and objective
- **Inter-centre variability:** not reported; no stratification of randomisation by centre described
- **Conflict of interests:** supported by Glaxo Wellcome Research and Development and one author from it

continued

Quality criteria for assessment of experimental studies	
1. Was the assignment to the treatment groups really random?	Unknown
2. Was the treatment allocation concealed?	Unknown
3. Were the groups similar at baseline in terms of prognostic factors?	Reported
4. Were outcome assessors blinded to the treatment allocation?	Unknown
5. Was the care provider blinded?	Unknown
6. Was the patient blinded?	Adequate
7. Were the point estimates and measure of variability presented for the primary outcome measure?	Adequate
8. Did the analyses include an ITT analysis?	Adequate
9. Were withdrawals and drop-outs completely described?	Adequate

From: NHS Centre for Reviews and Dissemination. *Undertaking systematic reviews of research on effectiveness: guidance for those carrying out or commissioning reviews* (Report 4). URL: http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/crd/report4.htm.

Appendix 5

Systematic review of clinical effectiveness: list of studies from updated literature search to be included in any future update of the assessment report

RCT

Pohunek P, Kuna P, Jorup C, De Boeck K. Budesonide/formoterol improves lung function compared with budesonide alone in children with asthma. *Pediatr Allergy Immunol* 2006;**17**:458–65.

Systematic review

Pedersen S. Clinical safety of inhaled corticosteroids for asthma in children: an update of long-term trials. *Drug Saf* 2006;**29**:599–612.

Appendix 6

Systematic review of clinical effectiveness: conference abstracts identified in the clinical effectiveness review

Geppe NA, Karpushkina AV, Kolossova NG, Yarovaya EB. The effects of fluticasone propionate/salmeterole 50/100 µg bid in children with asthma versus beclometasone propionate 200 µg BD and fluticasone propionate 100 µg bid dry powder inhalers [Abstract]. *Eur Respir J* 2004;**24**:378s.

GlaxoSmithKline. *A multicentre, randomised, double-blind, double-dummy, parallel group comparison of three treatments: (1) salmeterol/fluticasone propionate (SFC) (50/100 µg strength) bd via DISKUS/ACCUHALER inhaler, (2) fluticasone propionate 200 µg bd via DISKUS/ACCUHALER inhaler, (3) fluticasone propionate 100 µg bd via DISKUS/ACCUHALER inhaler in children aged 4–11 years with asthma*. URL: www.clinicalstudyresults.org. 2004.

Mokina NA, Geppe NA. The experience of study of comparative efficiency of steroid fluticasone and becla metasone at children [Abstract]. *Eur Respir J* 2004; **24**:165s.

Health Technology Assessment reports published to date

Volume 1, 1997

No. 1
Home parenteral nutrition: a systematic review.
By Richards DM, Deeks JJ, Sheldon TA, Shaffer JL.

No. 2
Diagnosis, management and screening of early localised prostate cancer.
A review by Selley S, Donovan J, Faulkner A, Coast J, Gillatt D.

No. 3
The diagnosis, management, treatment and costs of prostate cancer in England and Wales.
A review by Chamberlain J, Melia J, Moss S, Brown J.

No. 4
Screening for fragile X syndrome.
A review by Murray J, Cuckle H, Taylor G, Hewison J.

No. 5
A review of near patient testing in primary care.
By Hobbs FDR, Delaney BC, Fitzmaurice DA, Wilson S, Hyde CJ, Thorpe GH, *et al*.

No. 6
Systematic review of outpatient services for chronic pain control.
By McQuay HJ, Moore RA, Eccleston C, Morley S, de C Williams AC.

No. 7
Neonatal screening for inborn errors of metabolism: cost, yield and outcome.
A review by Pollitt RJ, Green A, McCabe CJ, Booth A, Cooper NJ, Leonard JV, *et al*.

No. 8
Preschool vision screening.
A review by Snowdon SK, Stewart-Brown SL.

No. 9
Implications of socio-cultural contexts for the ethics of clinical trials.
A review by Ashcroft RE, Chadwick DW, Clark SRL, Edwards RHT, Frith L, Hutton JL.

No. 10
A critical review of the role of neonatal hearing screening in the detection of congenital hearing impairment.
By Davis A, Bamford J, Wilson I, Ramkalawan T, Forshaw M, Wright S.

No. 11
Newborn screening for inborn errors of metabolism: a systematic review.
By Seymour CA, Thomason MJ, Chalmers RA, Addison GM, Bain MD, Cockburn F, *et al*.

No. 12
Routine preoperative testing: a systematic review of the evidence.
By Munro J, Booth A, Nicholl J.

No. 13
Systematic review of the effectiveness of laxatives in the elderly.
By Petticrew M, Watt I, Sheldon T.

No. 14
When and how to assess fast-changing technologies: a comparative study of medical applications of four generic technologies.
A review by Mowatt G, Bower DJ, Brebner JA, Cairns JA, Grant AM, McKee L.

Volume 2, 1998

No. 1
Antenatal screening for Down's syndrome.
A review by Wald NJ, Kennard A, Hackshaw A, McGuire A.

No. 2
Screening for ovarian cancer: a systematic review.
By Bell R, Petticrew M, Luengo S, Sheldon TA.

No. 3
Consensus development methods, and their use in clinical guideline development.
A review by Murphy MK, Black NA, Lamping DL, McKee CM, Sanderson CFB, Askham J, *et al*.

No. 4
A cost–utility analysis of interferon beta for multiple sclerosis.
By Parkin D, McNamee P, Jacoby A, Miller P, Thomas S, Bates D.

No. 5
Effectiveness and efficiency of methods of dialysis therapy for end-stage renal disease: systematic reviews.
By MacLeod A, Grant A, Donaldson C, Khan I, Campbell M, Daly C, *et al*.

No. 6
Effectiveness of hip prostheses in primary total hip replacement: a critical review of evidence and an economic model.
By Faulkner A, Kennedy LG, Baxter K, Donovan J, Wilkinson M, Bevan G.

No. 7
Antimicrobial prophylaxis in colorectal surgery: a systematic review of randomised controlled trials.
By Song F, Glenny AM.

No. 8
Bone marrow and peripheral blood stem cell transplantation for malignancy.
A review by Johnson PWM, Simnett SJ, Sweetenham JW, Morgan GJ, Stewart LA.

No. 9
Screening for speech and language delay: a systematic review of the literature.
By Law J, Boyle J, Harris F, Harkness A, Nye C.

No. 10
Resource allocation for chronic stable angina: a systematic review of effectiveness, costs and cost-effectiveness of alternative interventions.
By Sculpher MJ, Petticrew M, Kelland JL, Elliott RA, Holdright DR, Buxton MJ.

No. 11
Detection, adherence and control of hypertension for the prevention of stroke: a systematic review.
By Ebrahim S.

No. 12
Postoperative analgesia and vomiting, with special reference to day-case surgery: a systematic review.
By McQuay HJ, Moore RA.

No. 13
Choosing between randomised and nonrandomised studies: a systematic review.
By Britton A, McKee M, Black N, McPherson K, Sanderson C, Bain C.

No. 14
Evaluating patient-based outcome measures for use in clinical trials.
A review by Fitzpatrick R, Davey C, Buxton MJ, Jones DR.

No. 15
Ethical issues in the design and conduct of randomised controlled trials.
A review by Edwards SJL, Lilford RJ, Braunholtz DA, Jackson JC, Hewison J, Thornton J.

No. 16
Qualitative research methods in health technology assessment: a review of the literature.
By Murphy E, Dingwall R, Greatbatch D, Parker S, Watson P.

No. 17
The costs and benefits of paramedic skills in pre-hospital trauma care.
By Nicholl J, Hughes S, Dixon S, Turner J, Yates D.

No. 18
Systematic review of endoscopic ultrasound in gastro-oesophageal cancer.
By Harris KM, Kelly S, Berry E, Hutton J, Roderick P, Cullingworth J, *et al*.

No. 19
Systematic reviews of trials and other studies.
By Sutton AJ, Abrams KR, Jones DR, Sheldon TA, Song F.

No. 20
Primary total hip replacement surgery: a systematic review of outcomes and modelling of cost-effectiveness associated with different prostheses.
A review by Fitzpatrick R, Shortall E, Sculpher M, Murray D, Morris R, Lodge M, *et al*.

Volume 3, 1999

No. 1
Informed decision making: an annotated bibliography and systematic review.
By Bekker H, Thornton JG, Airey CM, Connelly JB, Hewison J, Robinson MB, *et al*.

No. 2
Handling uncertainty when performing economic evaluation of healthcare interventions.
A review by Briggs AH, Gray AM.

No. 3
The role of expectancies in the placebo effect and their use in the delivery of health care: a systematic review.
By Crow R, Gage H, Hampson S, Hart J, Kimber A, Thomas H.

No. 4
A randomised controlled trial of different approaches to universal antenatal HIV testing: uptake and acceptability. Annex: Antenatal HIV testing – assessment of a routine voluntary approach.
By Simpson WM, Johnstone FD, Boyd FM, Goldberg DJ, Hart GJ, Gormley SM, *et al*.

No. 5
Methods for evaluating area-wide and organisation-based interventions in health and health care: a systematic review.
By Ukoumunne OC, Gulliford MC, Chinn S, Sterne JAC, Burney PGJ.

No. 6
Assessing the costs of healthcare technologies in clinical trials.
A review by Johnston K, Buxton MJ, Jones DR, Fitzpatrick R.

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Cooperatives and their primary care emergency centres: organisation and impact.
By Hallam L, Henthorne K.

No. 8
Screening for cystic fibrosis.
A review by Murray J, Cuckle H, Taylor G, Littlewood J, Hewison J.

No. 9
A review of the use of health status measures in economic evaluation.
By Brazier J, Deverill M, Green C, Harper R, Booth A.

No. 10
Methods for the analysis of quality-of-life and survival data in health technology assessment.
A review by Billingham LJ, Abrams KR, Jones DR.

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Antenatal and neonatal haemoglobinopathy screening in the UK: review and economic analysis.
By Zeuner D, Ades AE, Karnon J, Brown J, Dezateux C, Anionwu EN.

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Assessing the quality of reports of randomised trials: implications for the conduct of meta-analyses.
A review by Moher D, Cook DJ, Jadad AR, Tugwell P, Moher M, Jones A, *et al*.

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'Early warning systems' for identifying new healthcare technologies.
By Robert G, Stevens A, Gabbay J.

No. 14
A systematic review of the role of human papillomavirus testing within a cervical screening programme.
By Cuzick J, Sasieni P, Davies P, Adams J, Normand C, Frater A, *et al*.

No. 15
Near patient testing in diabetes clinics: appraising the costs and outcomes.
By Grieve R, Beech R, Vincent J, Mazurkiewicz J.

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Positron emission tomography: establishing priorities for health technology assessment.
A review by Robert G, Milne R.

No. 17 (Pt 1)
The debridement of chronic wounds: a systematic review.
By Bradley M, Cullum N, Sheldon T.

No. 17 (Pt 2)
Systematic reviews of wound care management: (2) Dressings and topical agents used in the healing of chronic wounds.
By Bradley M, Cullum N, Nelson EA, Petticrew M, Sheldon T, Torgerson D.

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A systematic literature review of spiral and electron beam computed tomography: with particular reference to clinical applications in hepatic lesions, pulmonary embolus and coronary artery disease.
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Antimicrobial prophylaxis in total hip replacement: a systematic review.
By Glenny AM, Song F.

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Economic evaluation of a primary care-based education programme for patients with osteoarthritis of the knee.
A review by Lord J, Victor C, Littlejohns P, Ross FM, Axford JS.

Volume 4, 2000

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The estimation of marginal time preference in a UK-wide sample (TEMPUS) project.
A review by Cairns JA, van der Pol MM.

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Geriatric rehabilitation following fractures in older people: a systematic review.
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By French RS, Cowan FM, Mansour DJA, Morris S, Procter T, Hughes D, *et al*.

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A review by White SJ, Ashby D, Brown PJ.

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Ultrasound screening in pregnancy: a systematic review of the clinical effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and women's views.
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A systematic review of treatments for severe psoriasis.
By Griffiths CEM, Clark CM, Chalmers RJG, Li Wan Po A, Williams HC.

Volume 5, 2001

No. 1
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of donepezil, rivastigmine and galantamine for Alzheimer's disease: a rapid and systematic review.
By Clegg A, Bryant J, Nicholson T, McIntyre L, De Broe S, Gerard K, *et al*.

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General health status measures for people with cognitive impairment: learning disability and acquired brain injury.
By Riemsma RP, Forbes CA, Glanville JM, Eastwood AJ, Kleijnen J.

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An assessment of screening strategies for fragile X syndrome in the UK.
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Issues in methodological research: perspectives from researchers and commissioners.
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Systematic reviews of wound care management: (5) beds; (6) compression; (7) laser therapy, therapeutic ultrasound, electrotherapy and electromagnetic therapy.
By Cullum N, Nelson EA, Flemming K, Sheldon T.

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Effects of educational and psychosocial interventions for adolescents with diabetes mellitus: a systematic review.
By Hampson SE, Skinner TC, Hart J, Storey L, Gage H, Foxcroft D, *et al*.

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Effectiveness of autologous chondrocyte transplantation for hyaline cartilage defects in knees: a rapid and systematic review.
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Statistical assessment of the learning curves of health technologies.
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The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of temozolomide for the treatment of recurrent malignant glioma: a rapid and systematic review.
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No. 14
A rapid and systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of debriding agents in treating surgical wounds healing by secondary intention.
By Lewis R, Whiting P, ter Riet G, O'Meara S, Glanville J.

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Home treatment for mental health problems: a systematic review.
By Burns T, Knapp M, Catty J, Healey A, Henderson J, Watt H, *et al*.

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How to develop cost-conscious guidelines.
By Eccles M, Mason J.

No. 17
The role of specialist nurses in multiple sclerosis: a rapid and systematic review.
By De Broe S, Christopher F, Waugh N.

No. 18
A rapid and systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of orlistat in the management of obesity.
By O'Meara S, Riemsma R, Shirran L, Mather L, ter Riet G.

No. 19
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of pioglitazone for type 2 diabetes mellitus: a rapid and systematic review.
By Chilcott J, Wight J, Lloyd Jones M, Tappenden P.

No. 20
Extended scope of nursing practice: a multicentre randomised controlled trial of appropriately trained nurses and preregistration house officers in pre-operative assessment in elective general surgery.
By Kinley H, Czoski-Murray C, George S, McCabe C, Primrose J, Reilly C, *et al*.

No. 21
Systematic reviews of the effectiveness of day care for people with severe mental disorders: (1) Acute day hospital versus admission; (2) Vocational rehabilitation; (3) Day hospital versus outpatient care.
By Marshall M, Crowther R, Almaraz-Serrano A, Creed F, Sledge W, Kluiter H, *et al*.

No. 22
The measurement and monitoring of surgical adverse events.
By Bruce J, Russell EM, Mollison J, Krukowski ZH.

No. 23
Action research: a systematic review and guidance for assessment.
By Waterman H, Tillen D, Dickson R, de Koning K.

No. 24
A rapid and systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of gemcitabine for the treatment of pancreatic cancer.
By Ward S, Morris E, Bansback N, Calvert N, Crellin A, Forman D, *et al*.

No. 25
A rapid and systematic review of the evidence for the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of irinotecan, oxaliplatin and raltitrexed for the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer.
By Lloyd Jones M, Hummel S, Bansback N, Orr B, Seymour M.

No. 26
Comparison of the effectiveness of inhaler devices in asthma and chronic obstructive airways disease: a systematic review of the literature.
By Brocklebank D, Ram F, Wright J, Barry P, Cates C, Davies L, *et al*.

No. 27
The cost-effectiveness of magnetic resonance imaging for investigation of the knee joint.
By Bryan S, Weatherburn G, Bungay H, Hatrick C, Salas C, Parry D, *et al*.

No. 28
A rapid and systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of topotecan for ovarian cancer.
By Forbes C, Shirran L, Bagnall A-M, Duffy S, ter Riet G.

No. 29
Superseded by a report published in a later volume.

No. 30
The role of radiography in primary care patients with low back pain of at least 6 weeks duration: a randomised (unblinded) controlled trial.
By Kendrick D, Fielding K, Bentley E, Miller P, Kerslake R, Pringle M.

No. 31
Design and use of questionnaires: a review of best practice applicable to surveys of health service staff and patients.
By McColl E, Jacoby A, Thomas L, Soutter J, Bamford C, Steen N, *et al*.

No. 32
A rapid and systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of paclitaxel, docetaxel, gemcitabine and vinorelbine in non-small-cell lung cancer.
By Clegg A, Scott DA, Sidhu M, Hewitson P, Waugh N.

No. 33
Subgroup analyses in randomised controlled trials: quantifying the risks of false-positives and false-negatives.
By Brookes ST, Whitley E, Peters TJ, Mulheran PA, Egger M, Davey Smith G.

No. 34
Depot antipsychotic medication in the treatment of patients with schizophrenia: (1) Meta-review; (2) Patient and nurse attitudes.
By David AS, Adams C.

No. 35
A systematic review of controlled trials of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of brief psychological treatments for depression.
By Churchill R, Hunot V, Corney R, Knapp M, McGuire H, Tylee A, *et al*.

No. 36
Cost analysis of child health surveillance.
By Sanderson D, Wright D, Acton C, Duree D.

Volume 6, 2002

No. 1
A study of the methods used to select review criteria for clinical audit.
By Hearnshaw H, Harker R, Cheater F, Baker R, Grimshaw G.

No. 2
Fludarabine as second-line therapy for B cell chronic lymphocytic leukaemia: a technology assessment.
By Hyde C, Wake B, Bryan S, Barton P, Fry-Smith A, Davenport C, *et al*.

No. 3
Rituximab as third-line treatment for refractory or recurrent Stage III or IV follicular non-Hodgkin's lymphoma: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Wake B, Hyde C, Bryan S, Barton P, Song F, Fry-Smith A, *et al*.

No. 4
A systematic review of discharge arrangements for older people.
By Parker SG, Peet SM, McPherson A, Cannaby AM, Baker R, Wilson A, *et al*.

No. 5
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of inhaler devices used in the routine management of chronic asthma in older children: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Peters J, Stevenson M, Beverley C, Lim J, Smith S.

No. 6
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of sibutramine in the management of obesity: a technology assessment.
By O'Meara S, Riemsma R, Shirran L, Mather L, ter Riet G.

No. 7
The cost-effectiveness of magnetic resonance angiography for carotid artery stenosis and peripheral vascular disease: a systematic review.
By Berry E, Kelly S, Westwood ME, Davies LM, Gough MJ, Bamford JM, *et al*.

No. 8
Promoting physical activity in South Asian Muslim women through 'exercise on prescription'.
By Carroll B, Ali N, Azam N.

No. 9
Zanamivir for the treatment of influenza in adults: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Burls A, Clark W, Stewart T, Preston C, Bryan S, Jefferson T, *et al*.

No. 10
A review of the natural history and epidemiology of multiple sclerosis: implications for resource allocation and health economic models.
By Richards RG, Sampson FC, Beard SM, Tappenden P.

No. 11
Screening for gestational diabetes: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Scott DA, Loveman E, McIntyre L, Waugh N.

No. 12
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of surgery for people with morbid obesity: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Clegg AJ, Colquitt J, Sidhu MK, Royle P, Loveman E, Walker A.

No. 13
The clinical effectiveness of trastuzumab for breast cancer: a systematic review.
By Lewis R, Bagnall A-M, Forbes C, Shirran E, Duffy S, Kleijnen J, *et al*.

No. 14
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of vinorelbine for breast cancer: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Lewis R, Bagnall A-M, King S, Woolacott N, Forbes C, Shirran L, *et al*.

No. 15
A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of metal-on-metal hip resurfacing arthroplasty for treatment of hip disease.
By Vale L, Wyness L, McCormack K, McKenzie L, Brazzelli M, Stearns SC.

No. 16
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of bupropion and nicotine replacement therapy for smoking cessation: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Woolacott NF, Jones L, Forbes CA, Mather LC, Sowden AJ, Song FJ, *et al*.

No. 17
A systematic review of effectiveness and economic evaluation of new drug treatments for juvenile idiopathic arthritis: etanercept.
By Cummins C, Connock M, Fry-Smith A, Burls A.

No. 18
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of growth hormone in children: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Bryant J, Cave C, Mihaylova B, Chase D, McIntyre L, Gerard K, *et al*.

No. 19
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of growth hormone in adults in relation to impact on quality of life: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Bryant J, Loveman E, Chase D, Mihaylova B, Cave C, Gerard K, *et al*.

No. 20
Clinical medication review by a pharmacist of patients on repeat prescriptions in general practice: a randomised controlled trial.
By Zermansky AG, Petty DR, Raynor DK, Lowe CJ, Freementle N, Vail A.

No. 21
The effectiveness of infliximab and etanercept for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Jobanputra P, Barton P, Bryan S, Burls A.

No. 22
A systematic review and economic evaluation of computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for depression and anxiety.
By Kaltenthaler E, Shackley P, Stevens K, Beverley C, Parry G, Chilcott J.

No. 23
A systematic review and economic evaluation of pegylated liposomal doxorubicin hydrochloride for ovarian cancer.
By Forbes C, Wilby J, Richardson G, Sculpher M, Mather L, Reimsma R.

No. 24
A systematic review of the effectiveness of interventions based on a stages-of-change approach to promote individual behaviour change.
By Riemsma RP, Pattenden J, Bridle C, Sowden AJ, Mather L, Watt IS, *et al*.

No. 25
A systematic review update of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of glycoprotein IIb/IIIa antagonists.
By Robinson M, Ginnelly L, Sculpher M, Jones L, Riemsma R, Palmer S, *et al*.

No. 26
A systematic review of the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and barriers to implementation of thrombolytic and neuroprotective therapy for acute ischaemic stroke in the NHS.
By Sandercock P, Berge E, Dennis M, Forbes J, Hand P, Kwan J, *et al*.

No. 27
A randomised controlled crossover trial of nurse practitioner versus doctor-led outpatient care in a bronchiectasis clinic.
By Caine N, Sharples LD, Hollingworth W, French J, Keogan M, Exley A, *et al*.

No. 28
Clinical effectiveness and cost – consequences of selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors in the treatment of sex offenders.
By Adi Y, Ashcroft D, Browne K, Beech A, Fry-Smith A, Hyde C.

No. 29
Treatment of established osteoporosis: a systematic review and cost–utility analysis.
By Kanis JA, Brazier JE, Stevenson M, Calvert NW, Lloyd Jones M.

No. 30
Which anaesthetic agents are cost-effective in day surgery? Literature review, national survey of practice and randomised controlled trial.
By Elliott RA Payne K, Moore JK, Davies LM, Harper NJN, St Leger AS, *et al*.

No. 31
Screening for hepatitis C among injecting drug users and in genitourinary medicine clinics: systematic reviews of effectiveness, modelling study and national survey of current practice.
By Stein K, Dalziel K, Walker A, McIntyre L, Jenkins B, Horne J, *et al*.

No. 32
The measurement of satisfaction with healthcare: implications for practice from a systematic review of the literature.
By Crow R, Gage H, Hampson S, Hart J, Kimber A, Storey L, *et al*.

No. 33
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of imatinib in chronic myeloid leukaemia: a systematic review.
By Garside R, Round A, Dalziel K, Stein K, Royle R.

No. 34
A comparative study of hypertonic saline, daily and alternate-day rhDNase in children with cystic fibrosis.
By Suri R, Wallis C, Bush A, Thompson S, Normand C, Flather M, *et al*.

No. 35
A systematic review of the costs and effectiveness of different models of paediatric home care.
By Parker G, Bhakta P, Lovett CA, Paisley S, Olsen R, Turner D, *et al*.

Volume 7, 2003

No. 1
How important are comprehensive literature searches and the assessment of trial quality in systematic reviews? Empirical study.
By Egger M, Jüni P, Bartlett C, Holenstein F, Sterne J.

No. 2
Systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, and economic evaluation, of home versus hospital or satellite unit haemodialysis for people with end-stage renal failure.
By Mowatt G, Vale L, Perez J, Wyness L, Fraser C, MacLeod A, *et al*.

No. 3
Systematic review and economic evaluation of the effectiveness of infliximab for the treatment of Crohn's disease.
By Clark W, Raftery J, Barton P, Song F, Fry-Smith A, Burls A.

No. 4
A review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of routine anti-D prophylaxis for pregnant women who are rhesus negative.
By Chilcott J, Lloyd Jones M, Wight J, Forman K, Wray J, Beverley C, *et al*.

No. 5
Systematic review and evaluation of the use of tumour markers in paediatric oncology: Ewing's sarcoma and neuroblastoma.
By Riley RD, Burchill SA, Abrams KR, Heney D, Lambert PC, Jones DR, *et al*.

No. 6
The cost-effectiveness of screening for *Helicobacter pylori* to reduce mortality and morbidity from gastric cancer and peptic ulcer disease: a discrete-event simulation model.
By Roderick P, Davies R, Raftery J, Crabbe D, Pearce R, Bhandari P, *et al*.

No. 7
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of routine dental checks: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Davenport C, Elley K, Salas C, Taylor-Weetman CL, Fry-Smith A, Bryan S, *et al*.

No. 8
A multicentre randomised controlled trial assessing the costs and benefits of using structured information and analysis of women's preferences in the management of menorrhagia.
By Kennedy ADM, Sculpher MJ, Coulter A, Dwyer N, Rees M, Horsley S, *et al*.

No. 9
Clinical effectiveness and cost–utility of photodynamic therapy for wet age-related macular degeneration: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Meads C, Salas C, Roberts T, Moore D, Fry-Smith A, Hyde C.

No. 10
Evaluation of molecular tests for prenatal diagnosis of chromosome abnormalities.
By Grimshaw GM, Szczepura A, Hultén M, MacDonald F, Nevin NC, Sutton F, *et al*.

No. 11
First and second trimester antenatal screening for Down's syndrome: the results of the Serum, Urine and Ultrasound Screening Study (SURUSS).
By Wald NJ, Rodeck C, Hackshaw AK, Walters J, Chitty L, Mackinson AM.

No. 12
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of ultrasound locating devices for central venous access: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Calvert N, Hind D, McWilliams RG, Thomas SM, Beverley C, Davidson A.

No. 13
A systematic review of atypical antipsychotics in schizophrenia.
By Bagnall A-M, Jones L, Lewis R, Ginnelly L, Glanville J, Torgerson D, *et al*.

No. 14
Prostate Testing for Cancer and Treatment (ProtecT) feasibility study.
By Donovan J, Hamdy F, Neal D, Peters T, Oliver S, Brindle L, *et al*.

No. 15
Early thrombolysis for the treatment of acute myocardial infarction: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Boland A, Dundar Y, Bagust A, Haycox A, Hill R, Mujica Mota R, *et al*.

No. 16
Screening for fragile X syndrome: a literature review and modelling.
By Song FJ, Barton P, Sleightholme V, Yao GL, Fry-Smith A.

No. 17
Systematic review of endoscopic sinus surgery for nasal polyps.
By Dalziel K, Stein K, Round A, Garside R, Royle P.

No. 18
Towards efficient guidelines: how to monitor guideline use in primary care.
By Hutchinson A, McIntosh A, Cox S, Gilbert C.

No. 19
Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of acute hospital-based spinal cord injuries services: systematic review.
By Bagnall A-M, Jones L, Richardson G, Duffy S, Riemsma R.

No. 20
Prioritisation of health technology assessment. The PATHS model: methods and case studies.
By Townsend J, Buxton M, Harper G.

No. 21
Systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of tension-free vaginal tape for treatment of urinary stress incontinence.
By Cody J, Wyness L, Wallace S, Glazener C, Kilonzo M, Stearns S, *et al*.

No. 22
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of patient education models for diabetes: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Loveman E, Cave C, Green C, Royle P, Dunn N, Waugh N.

No. 23
The role of modelling in prioritising and planning clinical trials.
By Chilcott J, Brennan A, Booth A, Karnon J, Tappenden P.

No. 24
Cost–benefit evaluation of routine influenza immunisation in people 65–74 years of age.
By Allsup S, Gosney M, Haycox A, Regan M.

No. 25
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of pulsatile machine perfusion versus cold storage of kidneys for transplantation retrieved from heart-beating and non-heart-beating donors.
By Wight J, Chilcott J, Holmes M, Brewer N.

No. 26
Can randomised trials rely on existing electronic data? A feasibility study to explore the value of routine data in health technology assessment.
By Williams JG, Cheung WY, Cohen DR, Hutchings HA, Longo MF, Russell IT.

No. 27
Evaluating non-randomised intervention studies.
By Deeks JJ, Dinnes J, D'Amico R, Sowden AJ, Sakarovitch C, Song F, *et al*.

No. 28
A randomised controlled trial to assess the impact of a package comprising a patient-orientated, evidence-based self-help guidebook and patient-centred consultations on disease management and satisfaction in inflammatory bowel disease.
By Kennedy A, Nelson E, Reeves D, Richardson G, Roberts C, Robinson A, *et al*.

No. 29
The effectiveness of diagnostic tests for the assessment of shoulder pain due to soft tissue disorders: a systematic review.
By Dinnes J, Loveman E, McIntyre L, Waugh N.

No. 30
The value of digital imaging in diabetic retinopathy.
By Sharp PF, Olson J, Strachan F, Hipwell J, Ludbrook A, O'Donnell M, *et al*.

No. 31
Lowering blood pressure to prevent myocardial infarction and stroke: a new preventive strategy.
By Law M, Wald N, Morris J.

No. 32
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of capecitabine and tegafur with uracil for the treatment of metastatic colorectal cancer: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Ward S, Kaltenthaler E, Cowan J, Brewer N.

No. 33
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of new and emerging technologies for early localised prostate cancer: a systematic review.
By Hummel S, Paisley S, Morgan A, Currie E, Brewer N.

No. 34
Literature searching for clinical and cost-effectiveness studies used in health technology assessment reports carried out for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence appraisal system.
By Royle P, Waugh N.

No. 35
Systematic review and economic decision modelling for the prevention and treatment of influenza A and B.
By Turner D, Wailoo A, Nicholson K, Cooper N, Sutton A, Abrams K.

No. 36
A randomised controlled trial to evaluate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of Hickman line insertions in adult cancer patients by nurses.
By Boland A, Haycox A, Bagust A, Fitzsimmons L.

No. 37
Redesigning postnatal care: a randomised controlled trial of protocol-based midwifery-led care focused on individual women's physical and psychological health needs.
By MacArthur C, Winter HR, Bick DE, Lilford RJ, Lancashire RJ, Knowles H, *et al*.

No. 38
Estimating implied rates of discount in healthcare decision-making.
By West RR, McNabb R, Thompson AGH, Sheldon TA, Grimley Evans J.

No. 39
Systematic review of isolation policies in the hospital management of methicillin-resistant *Staphylococcus aureus*: a review of the literature with epidemiological and economic modelling.
By Cooper BS, Stone SP, Kibbler CC, Cookson BD, Roberts JA, Medley GF, *et al*.

No. 40
Treatments for spasticity and pain in multiple sclerosis: a systematic review.
By Beard S, Hunn A, Wight J.

No. 41
The inclusion of reports of randomised trials published in languages other than English in systematic reviews.
By Moher D, Pham B, Lawson ML, Klassen TP.

No. 42
The impact of screening on future health-promoting behaviours and health beliefs: a systematic review.
By Bankhead CR, Brett J, Bukach C, Webster P, Stewart-Brown S, Munafo M, *et al*.

Volume 8, 2004

No. 1
What is the best imaging strategy for acute stroke?
By Wardlaw JM, Keir SL, Seymour J, Lewis S, Sandercock PAG, Dennis MS, *et al*.

No. 2
Systematic review and modelling of the investigation of acute and chronic chest pain presenting in primary care.
By Mant J, McManus RJ, Oakes RAL, Delaney BC, Barton PM, Deeks JJ, *et al*.

No. 3
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of microwave and thermal balloon endometrial ablation for heavy menstrual bleeding: a systematic review and economic modelling.
By Garside R, Stein K, Wyatt K, Round A, Price A.

No. 4
A systematic review of the role of bisphosphonates in metastatic disease.
By Ross JR, Saunders Y, Edmonds PM, Patel S, Wonderling D, Normand C, *et al*.

No. 5
Systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of capecitabine (Xeloda®) for locally advanced and/or metastatic breast cancer.
By Jones L, Hawkins N, Westwood M, Wright K, Richardson G, Riemsma R.

No. 6
Effectiveness and efficiency of guideline dissemination and implementation strategies.
By Grimshaw JM, Thomas RE, MacLennan G, Fraser C, Ramsay CR, Vale L, *et al*.

No. 7
Clinical effectiveness and costs of the Sugarbaker procedure for the treatment of pseudomyxoma peritonei.
By Bryant J, Clegg AJ, Sidhu MK, Brodin H, Royle P, Davidson P.

No. 8
Psychological treatment for insomnia in the regulation of long-term hypnotic drug use.
By Morgan K, Dixon S, Mathers N, Thompson J, Tomeny M.

No. 9
Improving the evaluation of therapeutic interventions in multiple sclerosis: development of a patient-based measure of outcome.
By Hobart JC, Riazi A, Lamping DL, Fitzpatrick R, Thompson AJ.

No. 10
A systematic review and economic evaluation of magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography compared with diagnostic endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography.
By Kaltenthaler E, Bravo Vergel Y, Chilcott J, Thomas S, Blakeborough T, Walters SJ, *et al*.

No. 11
The use of modelling to evaluate new drugs for patients with a chronic condition: the case of antibodies against tumour necrosis factor in rheumatoid arthritis.
By Barton P, Jobanputra P, Wilson J, Bryan S, Burls A.

No. 12
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of neonatal screening for inborn errors of metabolism using tandem mass spectrometry: a systematic review.
By Pandor A, Eastham J, Beverley C, Chilcott J, Paisley S.

No. 13
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of pioglitazone and rosiglitazone in the treatment of type 2 diabetes: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Czoski-Murray C, Warren E, Chilcott J, Beverley C, Psyllaki MA, Cowan J.

No. 14
Routine examination of the newborn: the EMREN study. Evaluation of an extension of the midwife role including a randomised controlled trial of appropriately trained midwives and paediatric senior house officers.
By Townsend J, Wolke D, Hayes J, Davé S, Rogers C, Bloomfield L, *et al*.

No. 15
Involving consumers in research and development agenda setting for the NHS: developing an evidence-based approach.
By Oliver S, Clarke-Jones L, Rees R, Milne R, Buchanan P, Gabbay J, *et al*.

No. 16
A multi-centre randomised controlled trial of minimally invasive direct coronary bypass grafting versus percutaneous transluminal coronary angioplasty with stenting for proximal stenosis of the left anterior descending coronary artery.
By Reeves BC, Angelini GD, Bryan AJ, Taylor FC, Cripps T, Spyt TJ, *et al*.

No. 17
Does early magnetic resonance imaging influence management or improve outcome in patients referred to secondary care with low back pain? A pragmatic randomised controlled trial.
By Gilbert FJ, Grant AM, Gillan MGC, Vale L, Scott NW, Campbell MK, *et al*.

No. 18
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of anakinra for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis in adults: a systematic review and economic analysis.
By Clark W, Jobanputra P, Barton P, Burls A.

No. 19
A rapid and systematic review and economic evaluation of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of newer drugs for treatment of mania associated with bipolar affective disorder.
By Bridle C, Palmer S, Bagnall A-M, Darba J, Duffy S, Sculpher M, *et al*.

No. 20
Liquid-based cytology in cervical screening: an updated rapid and systematic review and economic analysis.
By Karnon J, Peters J, Platt J, Chilcott J, McGoogan E, Brewer N.

No. 21
Systematic review of the long-term effects and economic consequences of treatments for obesity and implications for health improvement.
By Avenell A, Broom J, Brown TJ, Poobalan A, Aucott L, Stearns SC, *et al*.

No. 22
Autoantibody testing in children with newly diagnosed type 1 diabetes mellitus.
By Dretzke J, Cummins C, Sandercock J, Fry-Smith A, Barrett T, Burls A.

No. 23
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of prehospital intravenous fluids in trauma patients.
By Dretzke J, Sandercock J, Bayliss S, Burls A.

No. 24
Newer hypnotic drugs for the short-term management of insomnia: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Dündar Y, Boland A, Strobl J, Dodd S, Haycox A, Bagust A, *et al*.

No. 25
Development and validation of methods for assessing the quality of diagnostic accuracy studies.
By Whiting P, Rutjes AWS, Dinnes J, Reitsma JB, Bossuyt PMM, Kleijnen J.

No. 26
EVALUATE hysterectomy trial: a multicentre randomised trial comparing abdominal, vaginal and laparoscopic methods of hysterectomy.
By Garry R, Fountain J, Brown J, Manca A, Mason S, Sculpher M, *et al*.

No. 27
Methods for expected value of information analysis in complex health economic models: developments on the health economics of interferon-β and glatiramer acetate for multiple sclerosis.
By Tappenden P, Chilcott JB, Eggington S, Oakley J, McCabe C.

No. 28
Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of imatinib for first-line treatment of chronic myeloid leukaemia in chronic phase: a systematic review and economic analysis.
By Dalziel K, Round A, Stein K, Garside R, Price A.

No. 29
VenUS I: a randomised controlled trial of two types of bandage for treating venous leg ulcers.
By Iglesias C, Nelson EA, Cullum NA, Torgerson DJ on behalf of the VenUS Team.

No. 30
Systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, and economic evaluation, of myocardial perfusion scintigraphy for the diagnosis and management of angina and myocardial infarction.
By Mowatt G, Vale L, Brazzelli M, Hernandez R, Murray A, Scott N, *et al*.

No. 31
A pilot study on the use of decision theory and value of information analysis as part of the NHS Health Technology Assessment programme.
By Claxton K, Ginnelly L, Sculpher M, Philips Z, Palmer S.

No. 32
The Social Support and Family Health Study: a randomised controlled trial and economic evaluation of two alternative forms of postnatal support for mothers living in disadvantaged inner-city areas.
By Wiggins M, Oakley A, Roberts I, Turner H, Rajan L, Austerberry H, *et al*.

No. 33
Psychosocial aspects of genetic screening of pregnant women and newborns: a systematic review.
By Green JM, Hewison J, Bekker HL, Bryant, Cuckle HS.

No. 34
Evaluation of abnormal uterine bleeding: comparison of three outpatient procedures within cohorts defined by age and menopausal status.
By Critchley HOD, Warner P, Lee AJ, Brechin S, Guise J, Graham B.

No. 35
Coronary artery stents: a rapid systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Hill R, Bagust A, Bakhai A, Dickson R, Dündar Y, Haycox A, *et al*.

No. 36
Review of guidelines for good practice in decision-analytic modelling in health technology assessment.
By Philips Z, Ginnelly L, Sculpher M, Claxton K, Golder S, Riemsma R, *et al*.

No. 37
Rituximab (MabThera®) for aggressive non-Hodgkin's lymphoma: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Knight C, Hind D, Brewer N, Abbott V.

No. 38
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of clopidogrel and modified-release dipyridamole in the secondary prevention of occlusive vascular events: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Jones L, Griffin S, Palmer S, Main C, Orton V, Sculpher M, *et al.*

No. 39
Pegylated interferon α-2a and -2b in combination with ribavirin in the treatment of chronic hepatitis C: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Shepherd J, Brodin H, Cave C, Waugh N, Price A, Gabbay J.

No. 40
Clopidogrel used in combination with aspirin compared with aspirin alone in the treatment of non-ST-segment-elevation acute coronary syndromes: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Main C, Palmer S, Griffin S, Jones L, Orton V, Sculpher M, *et al.*

No. 41
Provision, uptake and cost of cardiac rehabilitation programmes: improving services to under-represented groups.
By Beswick AD, Rees K, Griebsch I, Taylor FC, Burke M, West RR, *et al.*

No. 42
Involving South Asian patients in clinical trials.
By Hussain-Gambles M, Leese B, Atkin K, Brown J, Mason S, Tovey P.

No. 43
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of continuous subcutaneous insulin infusion for diabetes.
By Colquitt JL, Green C, Sidhu MK, Hartwell D, Waugh N.

No. 44
Identification and assessment of ongoing trials in health technology assessment reviews.
By Song FJ, Fry-Smith A, Davenport C, Bayliss S, Adi Y, Wilson JS, *et al*.

No. 45
Systematic review and economic evaluation of a long-acting insulin analogue, insulin glargine
By Warren E, Weatherley-Jones E, Chilcott J, Beverley C.

No. 46
Supplementation of a home-based exercise programme with a class-based programme for people with osteoarthritis of the knees: a randomised controlled trial and health economic analysis.
By McCarthy CJ, Mills PM, Pullen R, Richardson G, Hawkins N, Roberts CR, *et al*.

No. 47
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of once-daily versus more frequent use of same potency topical corticosteroids for atopic eczema: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Green C, Colquitt JL, Kirby J, Davidson P, Payne E.

No. 48
Acupuncture of chronic headache disorders in primary care: randomised controlled trial and economic analysis.
By Vickers AJ, Rees RW, Zollman CE, McCarney R, Smith CM, Ellis N, *et al*.

No. 49
Generalisability in economic evaluation studies in healthcare: a review and case studies.
By Sculpher MJ, Pang FS, Manca A, Drummond MF, Golder S, Urdahl H, *et al*.

No. 50
Virtual outreach: a randomised controlled trial and economic evaluation of joint teleconferenced medical consultations.
By Wallace P, Barber J, Clayton W, Currell R, Fleming K, Garner P, *et al*.

Volume 9, 2005

No. 1
Randomised controlled multiple treatment comparison to provide a cost-effectiveness rationale for the selection of antimicrobial therapy in acne.
By Ozolins M, Eady EA, Avery A, Cunliffe WJ, O'Neill C, Simpson NB, *et al*.

No. 2
Do the findings of case series studies vary significantly according to methodological characteristics?
By Dalziel K, Round A, Stein K, Garside R, Castelnuovo E, Payne L.

No. 3
Improving the referral process for familial breast cancer genetic counselling: findings of three randomised controlled trials of two interventions.
By Wilson BJ, Torrance N, Mollison J, Wordsworth S, Gray JR, Haites NE, *et al*.

No. 4
Randomised evaluation of alternative electrosurgical modalities to treat bladder outflow obstruction in men with benign prostatic hyperplasia.
By Fowler C, McAllister W, Plail R, Karim O, Yang Q.

No. 5
A pragmatic randomised controlled trial of the cost-effectiveness of palliative therapies for patients with inoperable oesophageal cancer.
By Shenfine J, McNamee P, Steen N, Bond J, Griffin SM.

No. 6
Impact of computer-aided detection prompts on the sensitivity and specificity of screening mammography.
By Taylor P, Champness J, Given-Wilson R, Johnston K, Potts H.

No. 7
Issues in data monitoring and interim analysis of trials.
By Grant AM, Altman DG, Babiker AB, Campbell MK, Clemens FJ, Darbyshire JH, *et al*.

No. 8
Lay public's understanding of equipoise and randomisation in randomised controlled trials.
By Robinson EJ, Kerr CEP, Stevens AJ, Lilford RJ, Braunholtz DA, Edwards SJ, *et al*.

No. 9
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of electroconvulsive therapy for depressive illness, schizophrenia, catatonia and mania: systematic reviews and economic modelling studies.
By Greenhalgh J, Knight C, Hind D, Beverley C, Walters S.

No. 10
Measurement of health-related quality of life for people with dementia: development of a new instrument (DEMQOL) and an evaluation of current methodology.
By Smith SC, Lamping DL, Banerjee S, Harwood R, Foley B, Smith P, *et al*.

No. 11
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of drotrecogin alfa (activated) (Xigris®) for the treatment of severe sepsis in adults: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Green C, Dinnes J, Takeda A, Shepherd J, Hartwell D, Cave C, *et al*.

No. 12
A methodological review of how heterogeneity has been examined in systematic reviews of diagnostic test accuracy.
By Dinnes J, Deeks J, Kirby J, Roderick P.

No. 13
Cervical screening programmes: can automation help? Evidence from systematic reviews, an economic analysis and a simulation modelling exercise applied to the UK.
By Willis BH, Barton P, Pearmain P, Bryan S, Hyde C.

No. 14
Laparoscopic surgery for inguinal hernia repair: systematic review of effectiveness and economic evaluation.
By McCormack K, Wake B, Perez J, Fraser C, Cook J, McIntosh E, *et al*.

No. 15
Clinical effectiveness, tolerability and cost-effectiveness of newer drugs for epilepsy in adults: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Wilby J, Kainth A, Hawkins N, Epstein D, McIntosh H, McDaid C, *et al*.

No. 16
A randomised controlled trial to compare the cost-effectiveness of tricyclic antidepressants, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors and lofepramine.
By Peveler R, Kendrick T, Buxton M, Longworth L, Baldwin D, Moore M, *et al*.

No. 17
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of immediate angioplasty for acute myocardial infarction: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Hartwell D, Colquitt J, Loveman E, Clegg AJ, Brodin H, Waugh N, *et al*.

No. 18
A randomised controlled comparison of alternative strategies in stroke care.
By Kalra L, Evans A, Perez I, Knapp M, Swift C, Donaldson N.

No. 19
The investigation and analysis of critical incidents and adverse events in healthcare.
By Woloshynowych M, Rogers S, Taylor-Adams S, Vincent C.

No. 20
Potential use of routine databases in health technology assessment.
By Raftery J, Roderick P, Stevens A.

No. 21
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of newer immunosuppressive regimens in renal transplantation: a systematic review and modelling study.
By Woodroffe R, Yao GL, Meads C, Bayliss S, Ready A, Raftery J, *et al*.

No. 22
A systematic review and economic evaluation of alendronate, etidronate, risedronate, raloxifene and teriparatide for the prevention and treatment of postmenopausal osteoporosis.
By Stevenson M, Lloyd Jones M, De Nigris E, Brewer N, Davis S, Oakley J.

No. 23
A systematic review to examine the impact of psycho-educational interventions on health outcomes and costs in adults and children with difficult asthma.
By Smith JR, Mugford M, Holland R, Candy B, Noble MJ, Harrison BDW, *et al*.

No. 24
An evaluation of the costs, effectiveness and quality of renal replacement therapy provision in renal satellite units in England and Wales.
By Roderick P, Nicholson T, Armitage A, Mehta R, Mullee M, Gerard K, *et al*.

No. 25
Imatinib for the treatment of patients with unresectable and/or metastatic gastrointestinal stromal tumours: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Wilson J, Connock M, Song F, Yao G, Fry-Smith A, Raftery J, *et al*.

No. 26
Indirect comparisons of competing interventions.
By Glenny AM, Altman DG, Song F, Sakarovitch C, Deeks JJ, D'Amico R, *et al*.

No. 27
Cost-effectiveness of alternative strategies for the initial medical management of non-ST elevation acute coronary syndrome: systematic review and decision-analytical modelling.
By Robinson M, Palmer S, Sculpher M, Philips Z, Ginnelly L, Bowens A, *et al*.

No. 28
Outcomes of electrically stimulated gracilis neosphincter surgery.
By Tillin T, Chambers M, Feldman R.

No. 29
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of pimecrolimus and tacrolimus for atopic eczema: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Garside R, Stein K, Castelnuovo E, Pitt M, Ashcroft D, Dimmock P, *et al*.

No. 30
Systematic review on urine albumin testing for early detection of diabetic complications.
By Newman DJ, Mattock MB, Dawnay ABS, Kerry S, McGuire A, Yaqoob M, *et al*.

No. 31
Randomised controlled trial of the cost-effectiveness of water-based therapy for lower limb osteoarthritis.
By Cochrane T, Davey RC, Matthes Edwards SM.

No. 32
Longer term clinical and economic benefits of offering acupuncture care to patients with chronic low back pain.
By Thomas KJ, MacPherson H, Ratcliffe J, Thorpe L, Brazier J, Campbell M, *et al*.

No. 33
Cost-effectiveness and safety of epidural steroids in the management of sciatica.
By Price C, Arden N, Coglan L, Rogers P.

No. 34
The British Rheumatoid Outcome Study Group (BROSG) randomised controlled trial to compare the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of aggressive versus symptomatic therapy in established rheumatoid arthritis.
By Symmons D, Tricker K, Roberts C, Davies L, Dawes P, Scott DL.

No. 35
Conceptual framework and systematic review of the effects of participants' and professionals' preferences in randomised controlled trials.
By King M, Nazareth I, Lampe F, Bower P, Chandler M, Morou M, *et al*.

No. 36
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of implantable cardioverter defibrillators: a systematic review.
By Bryant J, Brodin H, Loveman E, Payne E, Clegg A.

No. 37
A trial of problem-solving by community mental health nurses for anxiety, depression and life difficulties among general practice patients. The CPN-GP study.
By Kendrick T, Simons L, Mynors-Wallis L, Gray A, Lathlean J, Pickering R, *et al*.

No. 38
The causes and effects of socio-demographic exclusions from clinical trials.
By Bartlett C, Doyal L, Ebrahim S, Davey P, Bachmann M, Egger M, *et al*.

No. 39
Is hydrotherapy cost-effective? A randomised controlled trial of combined hydrotherapy programmes compared with physiotherapy land techniques in children with juvenile idiopathic arthritis.
By Epps H, Ginnelly L, Utley M, Southwood T, Gallivan S, Sculpher M, *et al*.

No. 40
A randomised controlled trial and cost-effectiveness study of systematic screening (targeted and total population screening) versus routine practice for the detection of atrial fibrillation in people aged 65 and over. The SAFE study.
By Hobbs FDR, Fitzmaurice DA, Mant J, Murray E, Jowett S, Bryan S, *et al*.

No. 41
Displaced intracapsular hip fractures in fit, older people: a randomised comparison of reduction and fixation, bipolar hemiarthroplasty and total hip arthroplasty.
By Keating JF, Grant A, Masson M, Scott NW, Forbes JF.

No. 42
Long-term outcome of cognitive behaviour therapy clinical trials in central Scotland.
By Durham RC, Chambers JA, Power KG, Sharp DM, Macdonald RR, Major KA, *et al*.

No. 43
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of dual-chamber pacemakers compared with single-chamber pacemakers for bradycardia due to atrioventricular block or sick sinus syndrome: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Castelnuovo E, Stein K, Pitt M, Garside R, Payne E.

No. 44
Newborn screening for congenital heart defects: a systematic review and cost-effectiveness analysis.
By Knowles R, Griebsch I, Dezateux C, Brown J, Bull C, Wren C.

No. 45
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of left ventricular assist devices for end-stage heart failure: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Clegg AJ, Scott DA, Loveman E, Colquitt J, Hutchinson J, Royle P, *et al*.

No. 46
The effectiveness of the Heidelberg Retina Tomograph and laser diagnostic glaucoma scanning system (GDx) in detecting and monitoring glaucoma.
By Kwartz AJ, Henson DB, Harper RA, Spencer AF, McLeod D.

No. 47
Clinical and cost-effectiveness of autologous chondrocyte implantation for cartilage defects in knee joints: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Clar C, Cummins E, McIntyre L, Thomas S, Lamb J, Bain L, *et al*.

No. 48
Systematic review of effectiveness of different treatments for childhood retinoblastoma.
By McDaid C, Hartley S, Bagnall A-M, Ritchie G, Light K, Riemsma R.

No. 49
Towards evidence-based guidelines for the prevention of venous thromboembolism: systematic reviews of mechanical methods, oral anticoagulation, dextran and regional anaesthesia as thromboprophylaxis.
By Roderick P, Ferris G, Wilson K, Halls H, Jackson D, Collins R, *et al*.

No. 50
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of parent training/education programmes for the treatment of conduct disorder, including oppositional defiant disorder, in children.
By Dretzke J, Frew E, Davenport C, Barlow J, Stewart-Brown S, Sandercock J, *et al*.

Volume 10, 2006

No. 1
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of donepezil, rivastigmine, galantamine and memantine for Alzheimer's disease.
By Loveman E, Green C, Kirby J, Takeda A, Picot J, Payne E, *et al*.

No. 2
FOOD: a multicentre randomised trial evaluating feeding policies in patients admitted to hospital with a recent stroke.
By Dennis M, Lewis S, Cranswick G, Forbes J.

No. 3
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of computed tomography screening for lung cancer: systematic reviews.
By Black C, Bagust A, Boland A, Walker S, McLeod C, De Verteuil R, *et al*.

No. 4
A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of neuroimaging assessments used to visualise the seizure focus in people with refractory epilepsy being considered for surgery.
By Whiting P, Gupta R, Burch J, Mujica Mota RE, Wright K, Marson A, *et al*.

No. 5
Comparison of conference abstracts and presentations with full-text articles in the health technology assessments of rapidly evolving technologies.
By Dundar Y, Dodd S, Dickson R, Walley T, Haycox A, Williamson PR.

No. 6
Systematic review and evaluation of methods of assessing urinary incontinence.
By Martin JL, Williams KS, Abrams KR, Turner DA, Sutton AJ, Chapple C, *et al*.

No. 7
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of newer drugs for children with epilepsy. A systematic review.
By Connock M, Frew E, Evans B-W, Bryan S, Cummins C, Fry-Smith A, *et al*.

No. 8
Surveillance of Barrett's oesophagus: exploring the uncertainty through systematic review, expert workshop and economic modelling.
By Garside R, Pitt M, Somerville M, Stein K, Price A, Gilbert N.

No. 9
Topotecan, pegylated liposomal doxorubicin hydrochloride and paclitaxel for second-line or subsequent treatment of advanced ovarian cancer: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Main C, Bojke L, Griffin S, Norman G, Barbieri M, Mather L, *et al*.

No. 10
Evaluation of molecular techniques in prediction and diagnosis of cytomegalovirus disease in immunocompromised patients.
By Szczepura A, Westmoreland D, Vinogradova Y, Fox J, Clark M.

No. 11
Screening for thrombophilia in high-risk situations: systematic review and cost-effectiveness analysis. The Thrombosis: Risk and Economic Assessment of Thrombophilia Screening (TREATS) study.
By Wu O, Robertson L, Twaddle S, Lowe GDO, Clark P, Greaves M, *et al*.

No. 12
A series of systematic reviews to inform a decision analysis for sampling and treating infected diabetic foot ulcers.
By Nelson EA, O'Meara S, Craig D, Iglesias C, Golder S, Dalton J, *et al*.

No. 13
Randomised clinical trial, observational study and assessment of cost-effectiveness of the treatment of varicose veins (REACTIV trial).
By Michaels JA, Campbell WB, Brazier JE, MacIntyre JB, Palfreyman SJ, Ratcliffe J, *et al*.

No. 14
The cost-effectiveness of screening for oral cancer in primary care.
By Speight PM, Palmer S, Moles DR, Downer MC, Smith DH, Henriksson M *et al*.

No. 15
Measurement of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of non-invasive diagnostic testing strategies for deep vein thrombosis.
By Goodacre S, Sampson F, Stevenson M, Wailoo A, Sutton A, Thomas S, *et al*.

No. 16
Systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of HealOzone® for the treatment of occlusal pit/fissure caries and root caries.
By Brazzelli M, McKenzie L, Fielding S, Fraser C, Clarkson J, Kilonzo M, *et al*.

No. 17
Randomised controlled trials of conventional antipsychotic versus new atypical drugs, and new atypical drugs versus clozapine, in people with schizophrenia responding poorly to, or intolerant of, current drug treatment.
By Lewis SW, Davies L, Jones PB, Barnes TRE, Murray RM, Kerwin R, *et al*.

No. 18
Diagnostic tests and algorithms used in the investigation of haematuria: systematic reviews and economic evaluation.
By Rodgers M, Nixon J, Hempel S, Aho T, Kelly J, Neal D, *et al*.

No. 19
Cognitive behavioural therapy in addition to antispasmodic therapy for irritable bowel syndrome in primary care: randomised controlled trial.
By Kennedy TM, Chalder T, McCrone P, Darnley S, Knapp M, Jones RH, *et al*.

No. 20
A systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of enzyme replacement therapies for Fabry's disease and mucopolysaccharidosis type 1.
By Connock M, Juarez-Garcia A, Frew E, Mans A, Dretzke J, Fry-Smith A, *et al*.

No. 21
Health benefits of antiviral therapy for mild chronic hepatitis C: randomised controlled trial and economic evaluation.
By Wright M, Grieve R, Roberts J, Main J, Thomas HC on behalf of the UK Mild Hepatitis C Trial Investigators.

No. 22
Pressure relieving support surfaces: a randomised evaluation.
By Nixon J, Nelson EA, Cranny G, Iglesias CP, Hawkins K, Cullum NA, *et al*.

No. 23
A systematic review and economic model of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of methylphenidate, dexamfetamine and atomoxetine for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children and adolescents.
By King S, Griffin S, Hodges Z, Weatherly H, Asseburg C, Richardson G, *et al*.

No. 24
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of enzyme replacement therapy for Gaucher's disease: a systematic review.
By Connock M, Burls A, Frew E, Fry-Smith A, Juarez-Garcia A, McCabe C, *et al*.

No. 25
Effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of salicylic acid and cryotherapy for cutaneous warts. An economic decision model.
By Thomas KS, Keogh-Brown MR, Chalmers JR, Fordham RJ, Holland RC, Armstrong SJ, *et al*.

No. 26
A systematic literature review of the effectiveness of non-pharmacological interventions to prevent wandering in dementia and evaluation of the ethical implications and acceptability of their use.
By Robinson L, Hutchings D, Corner L, Beyer F, Dickinson H, Vanoli A, *et al*.

No. 27
A review of the evidence on the effects and costs of implantable cardioverter defibrillator therapy in different patient groups, and modelling of cost-effectiveness and cost–utility for these groups in a UK context.
By Buxton M, Caine N, Chase D, Connelly D, Grace A, Jackson C, *et al*.

No. 28
Adefovir dipivoxil and pegylated interferon alfa-2a for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Shepherd J, Jones J, Takeda A, Davidson P, Price A.

No. 29
An evaluation of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of pulmonary artery catheters in patient management in intensive care: a systematic review and a randomised controlled trial.
By Harvey S, Stevens K, Harrison D, Young D, Brampton W, McCabe C, *et al*.

No. 30
Accurate, practical and cost-effective assessment of carotid stenosis in the UK.
By Wardlaw JM, Chappell FM, Stevenson M, De Nigris E, Thomas S, Gillard J, *et al*.

No. 31
Etanercept and infliximab for the treatment of psoriatic arthritis: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Woolacott N, Bravo Vergel Y, Hawkins N, Kainth A, Khadjesari Z, Misso K, *et al*.

No. 32
The cost-effectiveness of testing for hepatitis C in former injecting drug users.
By Castelnuovo E, Thompson-Coon J, Pitt M, Cramp M, Siebert U, Price A, *et al*.

No. 33
Computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for depression and anxiety update: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Kaltenthaler E, Brazier J, De Nigris E, Tumur I, Ferriter M, Beverley C, *et al*.

No. 34
Cost-effectiveness of using prognostic information to select women with breast cancer for adjuvant systemic therapy.
By Williams C, Brunskill S, Altman D, Briggs A, Campbell H, Clarke M, *et al*.

No. 35
Psychological therapies including dialectical behaviour therapy for borderline personality disorder: a systematic review and preliminary economic evaluation.
By Brazier J, Tumur I, Holmes M, Ferriter M, Parry G, Dent-Brown K, *et al*.

No. 36
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of tests for the diagnosis and investigation of urinary tract infection in children: a systematic review and economic model.
By Whiting P, Westwood M, Bojke L, Palmer S, Richardson G, Cooper J, *et al*.

No. 37
Cognitive behavioural therapy in chronic fatigue syndrome: a randomised controlled trial of an outpatient group programme.
By O'Dowd H, Gladwell P, Rogers CA, Hollinghurst S, Gregory A.

No. 38
A comparison of the cost-effectiveness of five strategies for the prevention of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug-induced gastrointestinal toxicity: a systematic review with economic modelling.
By Brown TJ, Hooper L, Elliott RA, Payne K, Webb R, Roberts C, *et al*.

No. 39
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of computed tomography screening for coronary artery disease: systematic review.
By Waugh N, Black C, Walker S, McIntyre L, Cummins E, Hillis G.

No. 40
What are the clinical outcome and cost-effectiveness of endoscopy undertaken by nurses when compared with doctors? A Multi-Institution Nurse Endoscopy Trial (MINuET).
By Williams J, Russell I, Durai D, Cheung W-Y, Farrin A, Bloor K, *et al*.

No. 41
The clinical and cost-effectiveness of oxaliplatin and capecitabine for the adjuvant treatment of colon cancer: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Pandor A, Eggington S, Paisley S, Tappenden P, Sutcliffe P.

No. 42
A systematic review of the effectiveness of adalimumab, etanercept and infliximab for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis in adults and an economic evaluation of their cost-effectiveness.
By Chen Y-F, Jobanputra P, Barton P, Jowett S, Bryan S, Clark W, *et al*.

No. 43
Telemedicine in dermatology: a randomised controlled trial.
By Bowns IR, Collins K, Walters SJ, McDonagh AJG.

No. 44
Cost-effectiveness of cell salvage and alternative methods of minimising perioperative allogeneic blood transfusion: a systematic review and economic model.
By Davies L, Brown TJ, Haynes S, Payne K, Elliott RA, McCollum C.

No. 45
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of laparoscopic surgery for colorectal cancer: systematic reviews and economic evaluation.
By Murray A, Lourenco T, de Verteuil R, Hernandez R, Fraser C, McKinley A, *et al*.

No. 46
Etanercept and efalizumab for the treatment of psoriasis: a systematic review.
By Woolacott N, Hawkins N, Mason A, Kainth A, Khadjesari Z, Bravo Vergel Y, *et al*.

No. 47
Systematic reviews of clinical decision tools for acute abdominal pain.
By Liu JLY, Wyatt JC, Deeks JJ, Clamp S, Keen J, Verde P, *et al*.

No. 48
Evaluation of the ventricular assist device programme in the UK.
By Sharples L, Buxton M, Caine N, Cafferty F, Demiris N, Dyer M, *et al*.

No. 49
A systematic review and economic model of the clinical and cost-effectiveness of immunosuppressive therapy for renal transplantation in children.
By Yao G, Albon E, Adi Y, Milford D, Bayliss S, Ready A, *et al*.

No. 50
Amniocentesis results: investigation of anxiety. The ARIA trial.
By Hewison J, Nixon J, Fountain J, Cocks K, Jones C, Mason G, *et al*.

Volume 11, 2007

No. 1
Pemetrexed disodium for the treatment of malignant pleural mesothelioma: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Dundar Y, Bagust A, Dickson R, Dodd S, Green J, Haycox A, *et al*.

No. 2
A systematic review and economic model of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of docetaxel in combination with prednisone or prednisolone for the treatment of hormone-refractory metastatic prostate cancer.
By Collins R, Fenwick E, Trowman R, Perard R, Norman G, Light K, *et al*.

No. 3
A systematic review of rapid diagnostic tests for the detection of tuberculosis infection.
By Dinnes J, Deeks J, Kunst H, Gibson A, Cummins E, Waugh N, *et al*.

No. 4
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of strontium ranelate for the prevention of osteoporotic fragility fractures in postmenopausal women.
By Stevenson M, Davis S, Lloyd-Jones M, Beverley C.

No. 5
A systematic review of quantitative and qualitative research on the role and effectiveness of written information available to patients about individual medicines.
By Raynor DK, Blenkinsopp A, Knapp P, Grime J, Nicolson DJ, Pollock K, *et al*.

No. 6
Oral naltrexone as a treatment for relapse prevention in formerly opioid-dependent drug users: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Adi Y, Juarez-Garcia A, Wang D, Jowett S, Frew E, Day E, *et al*.

No. 7
Glucocorticoid-induced osteoporosis: a systematic review and cost–utility analysis.
By Kanis JA, Stevenson M, McCloskey EV, Davis S, Lloyd-Jones M.

No. 8
Epidemiological, social, diagnostic and economic evaluation of population screening for genital chlamydial infection.
By Low N, McCarthy A, Macleod J, Salisbury C, Campbell R, Roberts TE, *et al*.

No. 9
Methadone and buprenorphine for the management of opioid dependence: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Connock M, Juarez-Garcia A, Jowett S, Frew E, Liu Z, Taylor RJ, *et al*.

No. 10
Exercise Evaluation Randomised Trial (EXERT): a randomised trial comparing GP referral for leisure centre-based exercise, community-based walking and advice only.
By Isaacs AJ, Critchley JA, See Tai S, Buckingham K, Westley D, Harridge SDR, *et al*.

No. 11
Interferon alfa (pegylated and non-pegylated) and ribavirin for the treatment of mild chronic hepatitis C: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Shepherd J, Jones J, Hartwell D, Davidson P, Price A, Waugh N.

No. 12
Systematic review and economic evaluation of bevacizumab and cetuximab for the treatment of metastatic colorectal cancer.
By Tappenden P, Jones R, Paisley S, Carroll C.

No. 13
A systematic review and economic evaluation of epoetin alfa, epoetin beta and darbepoetin alfa in anaemia associated with cancer, especially that attributable to cancer treatment.
By Wilson J, Yao GL, Raftery J, Bohlius J, Brunskill S, Sandercock J, *et al*.

No. 14
A systematic review and economic evaluation of statins for the prevention of coronary events.
By Ward S, Lloyd Jones M, Pandor A, Holmes M, Ara R, Ryan A, *et al*.

No. 15
A systematic review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different models of community-based respite care for frail older people and their carers.
By Mason A, Weatherly H, Spilsbury K, Arksey H, Golder S, Adamson J, *et al*.

No. 16
Additional therapy for young children with spastic cerebral palsy: a randomised controlled trial.
By Weindling AM, Cunningham CC, Glenn SM, Edwards RT, Reeves DJ.

No. 17
Screening for type 2 diabetes: literature review and economic modelling.
By Waugh N, Scotland G, McNamee P, Gillett M, Brennan A, Goyder E, *et al*.

No. 18
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of cinacalcet for secondary hyperparathyroidism in end-stage renal disease patients on dialysis: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Garside R, Pitt M, Anderson R, Mealing S, Roome C, Snaith A, *et al*.

No. 19
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of gemcitabine for metastatic breast cancer: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Takeda AL, Jones J, Loveman E, Tan SC, Clegg AJ.

No. 20
A systematic review of duplex ultrasound, magnetic resonance angiography and computed tomography angiography for the diagnosis and assessment of symptomatic, lower limb peripheral arterial disease.
By Collins R, Cranny G, Burch J, Aguiar-Ibáñez R, Craig D, Wright K, *et al*.

No. 21
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of treatments for children with idiopathic steroid-resistant nephrotic syndrome: a systematic review.
By Colquitt JL, Kirby J, Green C, Cooper K, Trompeter RS.

No. 22
A systematic review of the routine monitoring of growth in children of primary school age to identify growth-related conditions.
By Fayter D, Nixon J, Hartley S, Rithalia A, Butler G, Rudolf M, *et al*.

No. 23
Systematic review of the effectiveness of preventing and treating *Staphylococcus aureus* carriage in reducing peritoneal catheter-related infections.
By McCormack K, Rabindranath K, Kilonzo M, Vale L, Fraser C, McIntyre L, *et al*.

No. 24
The clinical effectiveness and cost of repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation versus electroconvulsive therapy in severe depression: a multicentre pragmatic randomised controlled trial and economic analysis.
By McLoughlin DM, Mogg A, Eranti S, Pluck G, Purvis R, Edwards D, *et al*.

No. 25
A randomised controlled trial and economic evaluation of direct versus indirect and individual versus group modes of speech and language therapy for children with primary language impairment.
By Boyle J, McCartney E, Forbes J, O'Hare A.

No. 26
Hormonal therapies for early breast cancer: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Hind D, Ward S, De Nigris E, Simpson E, Carroll C, Wyld L.

No. 27
Cardioprotection against the toxic effects of anthracyclines given to children with cancer: a systematic review.
By Bryant J, Picot J, Levitt G, Sullivan I, Baxter L, Clegg A.

No. 28
Adalimumab, etanercept and infliximab for the treatment of ankylosing spondylitis: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By McLeod C, Bagust A, Boland A, Dagenais P, Dickson R, Dundar Y, *et al*.

No. 29
Prenatal screening and treatment strategies to prevent group B streptococcal and other bacterial infections in early infancy: cost-effectiveness and expected value of information analyses.
By Colbourn T, Asseburg C, Bojke L, Philips Z, Claxton K, Ades AE, *et al*.

No. 30
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of bone morphogenetic proteins in the non-healing of fractures and spinal fusion: a systematic review.
By Garrison KR, Donell S, Ryder J, Shemilt I, Mugford M, Harvey I, *et al*.

No. 31
A randomised controlled trial of postoperative radiotherapy following breast-conserving surgery in a minimum-risk older population. The PRIME trial.
By Prescott RJ, Kunkler IH, Williams LJ, King CC, Jack W, van der Pol M, *et al*.

No. 32
Current practice, accuracy, effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the school entry hearing screen.
By Bamford J, Fortnum H, Bristow K, Smith J, Vamvakas G, Davies L, *et al*.

No. 33
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of inhaled insulin in diabetes mellitus: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Black C, Cummins E, Royle P, Philip S, Waugh N.

No. 34
Surveillance of cirrhosis for hepatocellular carcinoma: systematic review and economic analysis.
By Thompson Coon J, Rogers G, Hewson P, Wright D, Anderson R, Cramp M, *et al*.

No. 35
The Birmingham Rehabilitation Uptake Maximisation Study (BRUM). Home-based compared with hospital-based cardiac rehabilitation in a multi-ethnic population: cost-effectiveness and patient adherence.
By Jolly K, Taylor R, Lip GYH, Greenfield S, Raftery J, Mant J, *et al*.

No. 36
A systematic review of the clinical, public health and cost-effectiveness of rapid diagnostic tests for the detection and identification of bacterial intestinal pathogens in faeces and food.
By Abubakar I, Irvine L, Aldus CF, Wyatt GM, Fordham R, Schelenz S, *et al*.

No. 37
A randomised controlled trial examining the longer-term outcomes of standard versus new antiepileptic drugs. The SANAD trial.
By Marson AG, Appleton R, Baker GA, Chadwick DW, Doughty J, Eaton B, *et al*.

No. 38
Clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of different models of managing long-term oral anticoagulation therapy: a systematic review and economic modelling.
By Connock M, Stevens C, Fry-Smith A, Jowett S, Fitzmaurice D, Moore D, *et al*.

No. 39
A systematic review and economic model of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of interventions for preventing relapse in people with bipolar disorder.
By Soares-Weiser K, Bravo Vergel Y, Beynon S, Dunn G, Barbieri M, Duffy S, *et al*.

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Taxanes for the adjuvant treatment of early breast cancer: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Ward S, Simpson E, Davis S, Hind D, Rees A, Wilkinson A.

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The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of screening for open angle glaucoma: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Burr JM, Mowatt G, Hernández R, Siddiqui MAR, Cook J, Lourenco T, *et al*.

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Acceptability, benefit and costs of early screening for hearing disability: a study of potential screening tests and models.
By Davis A, Smith P, Ferguson M, Stephens D, Gianopoulos I.

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Contamination in trials of educational interventions.
By Keogh-Brown MR, Bachmann MO, Shepstone L, Hewitt C, Howe A, Ramsay CR, *et al*.

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Overview of the clinical effectiveness of positron emission tomography imaging in selected cancers.
By Facey K, Bradbury I, Laking G, Payne E.

No. 45
The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of carmustine implants and temozolomide for the treatment of newly diagnosed high-grade glioma: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Garside R, Pitt M, Anderson R, Rogers G, Dyer M, Mealing S, *et al*.

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Drug-eluting stents: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Hill RA, Boland A, Dickson R, Dündar Y, Haycox A, McLeod C, *et al*.

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The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of cardiac resynchronisation (biventricular pacing) for heart failure: systematic review and economic model.
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Recruitment to randomised trials: strategies for trial enrolment and participation study. The STEPS study.
By Campbell MK, Snowdon C, Francis D, Elbourne D, McDonald AM, Knight R, *et al*.

No. 49
Cost-effectiveness of functional cardiac testing in the diagnosis and management of coronary artery disease: a randomised controlled trial. The CECaT trial.
By Sharples L, Hughes V, Crean A, Dyer M, Buxton M, Goldsmith K, *et al*.

No. 50
Evaluation of diagnostic tests when there is no gold standard. A review of methods.
By Rutjes AWS, Reitsma JB, Coomarasamy A, Khan KS, Bossuyt PMM.

No. 51
Systematic reviews of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of proton pump inhibitors in acute upper gastrointestinal bleeding.
By Leontiadis GI, Sreedharan A, Dorward S, Barton P, Delaney B, Howden CW, *et al*.

No. 52
A review and critique of modelling in prioritising and designing screening programmes.
By Karnon J, Goyder E, Tappenden P, McPhie S, Towers I, Brazier J, *et al*.

No. 53
An assessment of the impact of the NHS Health Technology Assessment Programme.
By Hanney S, Buxton M, Green C, Coulson D, Raftery J.

Volume 12, 2008

No. 1
A systematic review and economic model of switching from non-glycopeptide to glycopeptide antibiotic prophylaxis for surgery.
By Cranny G, Elliott R, Weatherly H, Chambers D, Hawkins N, Myers L, *et al*.

No. 2
'Cut down to quit' with nicotine replacement therapies in smoking cessation: a systematic review of effectiveness and economic analysis.
By Wang D, Connock M, Barton P, Fry-Smith A, Aveyard P, Moore D.

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A systematic review of the effectiveness of strategies for reducing fracture risk in children with juvenile idiopathic arthritis with additional data on long-term risk of fracture and cost of disease management.
By Thornton J, Ashcroft D, O'Neill T, Elliott R, Adams J, Roberts C, *et al*.

No. 4
Does befriending by trained lay workers improve psychological well-being and quality of life for carers of people with dementia, and at what cost? A randomised controlled trial.
By Charlesworth G, Shepstone L, Wilson E, Thalanany M, Mugford M, Poland F.

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A multi-centre retrospective cohort study comparing the efficacy, safety and cost-effectiveness of hysterectomy and uterine artery embolisation for the treatment of symptomatic uterine fibroids. The HOPEFUL study.
By Hirst A, Dutton S, Wu O, Briggs A, Edwards C, Waldenmaier L, *et al*.

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Methods of prediction and prevention of pre-eclampsia: systematic reviews of accuracy and effectiveness literature with economic modelling.
By Meads CA, Cnossen JS, Meher S, Juarez-Garcia A, ter Riet G, Duley L, *et al*.

No. 7
The use of economic evaluations in NHS decision-making: a review and empirical investigation.
By Williams I, McIver S, Moore D, Bryan S.

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Stapled haemorrhoidectomy (haemorrhoidopexy) for the treatment of haemorrhoids: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Burch J, Epstein D, Baba-Akbari A, Weatherly H, Fox D, Golder S, *et al*.

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The clinical effectiveness of diabetes education models for Type 2 diabetes: a systematic review.
By Loveman E, Frampton GK, Clegg AJ.

No. 10
Payment to healthcare professionals for patient recruitment to trials: systematic review and qualitative study.
By Raftery J, Bryant J, Powell J, Kerr C, Hawker S.

No. 11
Cyclooxygenase-2 selective non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (etodolac, meloxicam, celecoxib, rofecoxib, etoricoxib, valdecoxib and lumiracoxib) for osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Chen Y-F, Jobanputra P, Barton P, Bryan S, Fry-Smith A, Harris G, *et al*.

No. 12
The clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of central venous catheters treated with anti-infective agents in preventing bloodstream infections: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Hockenhull JC, Dwan K, Boland A, Smith G, Bagust A, Dündar Y, *et al*.

No. 13
Stepped treatment of older adults on laxatives. The STOOL trial.
By Mihaylov S, Stark C, McColl E, Steen N, Vanoli A, Rubin G, *et al*.

No. 14
A randomised controlled trial of cognitive behaviour therapy in adolescents with major depression treated by selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors. The ADAPT trial.
By Goodyer IM, Dubicka B, Wilkinson P, Kelvin R, Roberts C, Byford S, *et al*.

No. 15
The use of irinotecan, oxaliplatin and raltitrexed for the treatment of advanced colorectal cancer: systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Hind D, Tappenden P, Tumur I, Eggington E, Sutcliffe P, Ryan A.

No. 16
Ranibizumab and pegaptanib for the treatment of age-related macular degeneration: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Colquitt JL, Jones J, Tan SC, Takeda A, Clegg AJ, Price A.

No. 17
Systematic review of the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of 64-slice or higher computed tomography angiography as an alternative to invasive coronary angiography in the investigation of coronary artery disease.
By Mowatt G, Cummins E, Waugh N, Walker S, Cook J, Jia X, *et al*.

No. 18
Structural neuroimaging in psychosis: a systematic review and economic evaluation.
By Albon E, Tsourapas A, Frew E, Davenport C, Oyebode F, Bayliss S, *et al*.

No. 19
Systematic review and economic analysis of the comparative effectiveness of different inhaled corticosteroids and their usage with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists for the treatment of chronic asthma in adults and children aged 12 years and over.
By Shepherd J, Rogers G, Anderson R, Main C, Thompson-Coon J, Hartwell D, *et al*.

No. 20
Systematic review and economic analysis of the comparative effectiveness of different inhaled corticosteroids and their usage with long-acting beta$_2$ agonists for the treatment of chronic asthma in children under the age of 12 years.
By Main C, Shepherd J, Anderson R, Rogers G, Thompson-Coon J, Liu Z, *et al*.

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We look forward to hearing from you.

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ISSN 1366-5278