Randomised controlled trial of Tumour necrosis factor inhibitors Against Combination Intensive Therapy with conventional disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs in established rheumatoid arthritis: the TACIT trial and associated systematic reviews

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Declared competing interests of authors: none

Published October 2014
DOI: 10.3310/hta18660

Plain English summary

TACIT trial and associated systematic reviews

Health Technology Assessment 2014; Vol. 18: No. 66
DOI: 10.3310/hta18660

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Patients with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) usually take methotrexate or similar conventional drugs to modify the course of their disease. These treatments are called disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs). If conventional DMARDs are insufficient patients try high-cost biological treatments. The main biologics are tumour necrosis factor inhibitors (TNFis).

As conventional DMARDs can be given in combination, it is possible that combination DMARDs (cDMARDs) may be equally as effective as but less expensive than TNFis.

We compared these approaches in a trial [Tumour necrosis factor inhibitors Against Combination Intensive Therapy (TACIT)]. We studied patients at 24 specialist centres to ensure that the findings apply throughout England. The trial lasted 12 months. Patients not helped by cDMARDs switched to TNFis after 6 months.

The trial showed that patients starting cDMARDs and patients starting TNFis do equally well. Disability decreased in both groups and quality of life improved over 1 year. Disease activity also fell in both groups. Joint damage stayed much the same. The chance of having side effects and the severity of side effects were similar in both groups. However, cDMARDs cost much less.

When the TACIT trial was completed we looked at all of the other trials published in the field. We did this systematically to make sure that we did not miss any out. These trials also showed that the two approaches give similar improvements over periods ranging from 6 months to 2 years.

We think that cDMARDs and TNFis are equally good in active RA. However, cDMARDs cost much less. As only a few patients underwent long-term remission neither treatment approach seemed ideal.
Health Technology Assessment

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)
ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)
Impact factor: 5.116

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, The Cochrane Library and the ISI Science Citation Index and is assessed for inclusion in the Database of Abstracts of Reviews of Effects.

This journal is a member of and subscribes to the principles of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) (www.publicationethics.org/).

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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 06/303/84. The contractual start date was in April 2007. The draft report began editorial review in February 2013 and was accepted for publication in September 2013. 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 reviewers 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.

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