A feasibility study to inform the design of a randomised controlled trial to identify the most clinically effective and cost-effective length of Anticoagulation with Low-molecular-weight heparin In the treatment of Cancer-Associated Thrombosis (ALICAT)

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Plain English summary

The ALICAT feasibility study

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Plain English summary

What was the problem/question?

The treatment of blood clots (thrombosis) in people with cancer is complex and informed by limited evidence. For some time, doctors have chosen to treat patients with ongoing active cancer beyond the recommended 6-month period. This is driven by consensus and not evidence. Although a study to explore the most appropriate treatment time is needed there is concern that since doctors are already established in their practice, it may not be possible to conduct a full randomised controlled trial (RCT).

What did we do?

The Anticoagulation with Low-molecular-weight heparin In the treatment of Cancer-Associated Thrombosis (ALICAT) trial aimed to explore whether or not such a study was possible by conducting a small feasibility study alongside a qualitative study exploring the views of patients and clinicians.

What did we find?

Only 5 out of 32 eligible patients agreed to participate in the study, suggesting a full RCT was not feasible. Patient interviews suggested patients had fixed views on their blood clot treatment depending upon past experiences. As such they did not wish to be randomised into a trial, which might change their preferred treatment course.

Clinicians also had firm views regarding the long-term treatment of cancer-associated thrombosis (CAT). Driven by the view that patients should continue clot treatment; they appeared unwilling to recruit many of their patients to such a study. A survey of clinician practice across the UK identified variability in the management of CAT as well as unclear ownership of the clinical problem.

What does this mean?

We concluded that the research question remains important, but the feasibility of successfully conducting the trial needed to answer it is low.

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