A multicentre, randomised controlled trial comparing the clinical effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of early nutritional support via the parenteral versus the enteral route in critically ill patients (CALORIES)

Sheila E Harvey,1 Francesca Parrott,1 David A Harrison,1 M Zia Sadique,2 Richard D Grieve,2 Ruth R Canter,1 Blair KP McLennan,1 Jermaine CK Tan,1 Danielle E Bear,3 Ella Segaran,4 Richard Beale,5 Geoff Bellingan,6 Richard Leonard,7 Michael G Mythen6 and Kathryn M Rowan1*

1Clinical Trials Unit, Intensive Care National Audit & Research Centre, London, UK
2Department of Health Services Research and Policy, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK
3Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK
4Department of Nutrition and Dietetics, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London, UK
5Division of Asthma, Allergy and Lung Biopsy, King’s College London, London, UK
6National Institute for Health Research Biomedical Research Centre, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, London, UK
7Department of Critical Care, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, London, UK

*Corresponding author

Declared competing interests of authors: Michael G Mythen reports grants from Smiths Medical Endowment and Deltrex Medical, personal fees from Edward Lifesciences and Fresenius-Kabi for speaking, consultation or travel expenses, and personal fees from AQIX (start-up company with novel crystalloid solution – pre-clinical), patent pending for the QUENCH pump and patent issued for Gastrotim outside the submitted work. Ella Segaran reports grants from Abbott Nutrition to attend a UK Intensive Care conference outside the submitted work. Danielle E Bear reports grants from the UK National Institute for Health Research Comprehensive Local Research Network, and personal fees/other support from Nestle Nutrition for speaker fees, Nutricia for speaker and consultancy fees plus payment of conference attendance, accommodation and travel expenses, Baxter for payment of course fees, travel and accommodation expenses and Corpak MedSystems UK for research support paid to Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust, outside the submitted work. Geoff Bellingan reports grants from the National Institute for Health Research for Selective Decontamination of the Digestive tract in critically ill patients treated in Intensive Care Unit (The SuDDICU study) (09/01/13) during the trial.
Plain English summary

Early nutritional support via the parenteral vs. the enteral route

Health Technology Assessment 2016; Vol. 20: No. 28
DOI: 10.3310/hta20280

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Plain English summary

There are two main ways to feed seriously ill patients who cannot eat for themselves: either directly into the bloodstream (the intravenous or parenteral route) or into the stomach (via a tube inserted through the mouth, nose or through the skin of the abdomen – the enteral route). It is not known which is best, particularly during the first few days of a serious illness. The aim of this study was to investigate which route is best for patients who have just been admitted to an intensive care unit of the UK NHS. We also measured the costs of each method.

A total of 2400 patients from 33 NHS hospitals took part in the study. Their feeding route was chosen at random. A total of 1200 patients were fed intravenously (the parenteral route) and 1200 patients were fed into the stomach (the enteral route).

There was no significant difference between the groups in the number of patients who died at 1, 3 or 12 months. Patients who received nutritional support via the stomach had more vomiting and more diarrhoea. At 12 months, the overall costs of intravenous feeding were £28,354 per patient and £26,775 for feeding via the stomach. The additional costs of intravenous feeding were not justified by better outcomes.

The results of the study support continuing to feed seriously ill patients via the stomach when this is possible.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 07/52/03. The contractual start date was in July 2010. The draft report began editorial review in July 2015 and was accepted for publication in November 2015. 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.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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