

Lactic acid gel versus metronidazole for recurrent bacterial vaginosis in women aged 16 years and over: the VITA RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors: Lindsay Armstrong-Buisseret reports ownership of shares in AstraZeneca plc (Cambridge, UK). Trish Hepburn reports ownership of shares in AstraZeneca plc. Alan Montgomery reports grants from the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) during the conduct of the trial, membership of the NIHR Health Technology Assessment (HTA) programme Clinical Evaluation and Trials Funding Committee (2016–present) and that Nottingham Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) receives CTU funding from NIHR. Jane Daniels reports membership of the NIHR CTU Standing Advisory Group (2016–22). Jonathan DC Ross reports personal fees from GlaxoSmithKline plc (Brentford, UK), Mycovia Pharmaceuticals, Inc. (Durham, NC, USA) and Nabriva Therapeutics (Dublin, Ireland); reports ownership of shares in GlaxoSmithKline plc and AstraZeneca plc; is author of the UK and European Guidelines on Pelvic Inflammatory Disease; is a member of the European Sexually Transmitted Infections Guidelines Editorial Board (2000–present); and is a member of the NIHR Funding Committee (HTA programme, 2016–present). He is a member of the NIHR HTA and Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation Editorial Board and is associate editor of the *Sexually Transmitted Infections* journal. He is an officer of the International Union against Sexually Transmitted Infections (treasurer) and a charity trustee of the Sexually Transmitted Infections Research Foundation.

Disclaimer: This report contains transcripts of interviews conducted in the course of the research and contains language that may offend some readers.

Published January 2022

DOI: 10.3310/ZZKH4176

Plain English summary

The VITA RCT

Health Technology Assessment 2022; Vol. 26: No. 2

DOI: 10.3310/ZZKH4176

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Plain English summary

Bacterial vaginosis is a common cause of unpleasant vaginal discharge that is caused by an imbalance of vaginal bacteria. The usual treatment is an antibiotic called metronidazole (Flagyl, Sanofi). Although this generally works in the short term, symptoms often return, leading to the repeated use of antibiotics; this can cause side effects as well as increase the risk of antibiotic resistance. Lactic acid gel might be an alternative treatment, but previous studies have not confirmed how clinically effective it is. We wanted to find out if lactic acid gel was better than metronidazole for treating recurrent bacterial vaginosis.

Women with typical symptoms and a history of bacterial vaginosis who were taking part in our trial were selected randomly to receive either 7 days of treatment with lactic acid gel inserted into the vagina once per day or 7 days of treatment with metronidazole tablets taken by mouth twice per day. Overall, 518 women took part in the trial. We originally intended to recruit 1900 women but the trial was stopped early because a planned review of the data showed which treatment was better.

Most of the women took all of their treatment and 70% reported that symptoms had cleared 2 weeks after taking metronidazole, compared with 47% after using lactic acid gel. Less than half of the women stayed in the trial for the full 6 months; however, the data suggested that the majority of those whose symptoms cleared within 2 weeks with either treatment had symptoms return over the next 6 months. More side effects were reported for metronidazole than for lactic acid gel: nausea 32% compared with 8%, taste changes 18% compared with 1%, and diarrhoea 20% compared with 6%, respectively.

Despite thinking that it was less effective, women preferred lactic acid gel because it avoided the need to take an antibiotic and had a soothing effect. The cost-effectiveness analysis found that lactic acid gel was less effective than metronidazole in clearing symptoms by 2 weeks and that the average costs for women whose symptoms resolved were higher (£86.94 with metronidazole vs. £147.00 with lactic acid gel).

Health Technology Assessment

ISSN 1366-5278 (Print)

ISSN 2046-4924 (Online)

Impact factor: 4.014

Health Technology Assessment is indexed in MEDLINE, CINAHL, EMBASE, the Cochrane Library and Clarivate Analytics Science Citation Index.

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 15/110/02. The contractual start date was in March 2017. The draft report began editorial review in October 2020 and was accepted for publication in January 2021. 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 and Social Care. 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 and Social Care.

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