Photodynamic versus white-light-guided resection of first-diagnosis non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer: PHOTO RCT

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Declared competing interests of authors: Rakesh Heer is a member of the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Health Technology Assessment (HTA) Commissioning committee (2017–present). Paramananthan Mariappan reports honoraria, travel expenses, accommodation and non-financial support from Ipsen (Paris, France) and grants from Kyowa Kirin International (Galashiels, UK) outside the submitted work. Craig Ramsay is a member of HTA Board (2017–present). Henry Lazarowicz reports that urine samples from the Photodynamic versus white-light-guided resection of first diagnosis non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer–Translational (PHOTO-T) study were donated to the University of Liverpool for use in the Volatile Organic compounDs in bladder cancer (VOID) translational research study; the author is a co-investigator on this study and the decision to collaborate and donate samples was made independently of the author’s presence on the Trial Management Group. John Norrie reports grants from the University of Aberdeen and the University of Edinburgh during the conduct of the study, and declares membership of the following NIHR boards: the Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) Decision-making Committee (2016), HTA Commissioning Board (2010–16), HTA Commissioning Sub-Board [Expressions of Interest (EOI)] (2012–16), HTA Funding Boards Policy Group (2016), HTA General Board (2016–19), HTA Post-Board funding teleconference (2016–19), NIHR Clinical Trials Unit (CTU) Standing Advisory Committee (2017–present), NIHR HTA and Efficacy and Mechanism Evaluation (EME) Editorial Board (2014–19) and Pre-exposure Prophylaxis Impact Review Panel (2017–present). Luke Vale reports membership of the NIHR HTA programme’s Clinical Trials and Evaluation Panel (2014–18). Emma Hall reports grants from Accuray Inc. (Sunnyvale, CA, USA), Varian Medical Systems Inc. (Crawley, UK), Merck Sharp & Dohme (Kenilworth, NJ, USA), Sanofi SA (Paris, France) and Janssen-Cilag (Beerse, Belgium); grants and non-financial support from AstraZeneca plc (Cambridge, UK); grants and non-financial support from Bayer AG (Leverkusen, Germany); and grants and non-financial support from Roche Products Ltd (Welwyn Garden City, UK) outside the submitted work.

Published October 2022
DOI: 10.3310/PLPU1526

Plain English summary

The PHOTO RCT
Health Technology Assessment 2022; Vol. 26: No. 40
DOI: 10.3310/PLPU1526

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Plain English summary

Around 7500 people are diagnosed with early-stage bladder cancer in the UK each year. Early bladder cancer is contained within the bladder and has not yet invaded the bladder’s muscle wall or spread elsewhere in the body. The cancer will return (recur) in around half of people after initial treatment and they have to attend hospital for regular check-ups, with costs to both them and the NHS.

The first step in treating early bladder cancer is surgery to remove the tumour. This surgery is normally performed under white light.

Photodynamic diagnosis is a new technique in which a liquid is put into the patient’s bladder before surgery and a blue light is used during the operation. This causes the bladder cancer to fluoresce so that it can be seen more easily by the surgeon.

The Photodynamic versus white-light-guided resection of first diagnosis non-muscle-invasive bladder cancer (PHOTO) trial aimed to find out whether or not using photodynamic diagnosis at initial surgery would reduce how often the cancer recurred and whether or not this could reduce the cost of treating early bladder cancer.

A total of 538 people with early bladder cancer who had a medium to high chance of their cancer returning after treatment were enrolled in the PHOTO trial. They were included in one of two treatment groups, at random: 269 had photodynamic surgery and 269 had standard white-light surgery. People in both groups were monitored regularly for any recurrences, with further treatment as appropriate.

After 3 years, 4 out of 10 people in each group had a recurrence of their bladder cancer. We found no difference between the treatment groups in the number of people with recurrences. We found no evidence of a benefit to patients, and the total costs of photodynamic surgery were higher than those of standard white light. We therefore recommend that it is no longer used in the treatment of this group of patients.
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### This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 11/142/02. The contractual start date was in June 2014. The draft report began editorial review in February 2021 and was accepted for publication in July 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 and Care 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, 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, the HTA programme or the Department of Health and Social Care.

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