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On Drugs and Therapeutics

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IN BRIEF

Prevention of Stroke in Patients with Atrial Fibrillation

Atrial fibrillation increases the risk of stroke by a factor of 5. A randomized controlled trial (ACTIVE W) in 6706 patients with atrial fibrillation and one or more additional risk factors (≥ 75 years old; hypertension; previous stroke, transient ischemic attack or non-CNS embolus; left ventricular ejection fraction $< 45\%$; peripheral vascular disease; or 55-74 years old plus diabetes or coronary artery disease) found that a vitamin K antagonist such as warfarin (*Coumadin*, and others) was superior to clopidogrel (*Plavix*) plus aspirin in preventing vascular events, especially ischemic stroke.¹

Now another study (ACTIVE A) from the same group of investigators has compared addition of clopidogrel to aspirin with aspirin alone in 7554 patients with atrial fibrillation and one or more additional risk factors for stroke. All of these patients were considered "unsuitable" for treatment with a vitamin K antagonist. Vascular events, primarily stroke, occurred significantly more often with aspirin alone. Major bleeding occurred significantly more often with aspirin plus clopidogrel.²

Oral anticoagulation with a vitamin K antagonist such as warfarin continues to be the treatment of choice for patients with atrial fibrillation and one or more additional risk factors for stroke.³⁻⁵ In patients who cannot or will not take a vitamin K antagonist, clopidogrel plus aspirin appears to be more effective in preventing stroke than aspirin alone.

1. ACTIVE Writing Group of the ACTIVE Investigators. Clopidogrel plus aspirin versus oral anticoagulation for atrial fibrillation in the Atrial fibrillation Clopidogrel Trial with Irbesartan for prevention of Vascular Events (ACTIVE W): a randomised controlled trial. *Lancet* 2006; 367:1903.
2. ACTIVE Investigators. Effect of clopidogrel added to aspirin in patients with atrial fibrillation. *N Engl J Med* 2009; 360:2066.
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4. DE Singer et al. Antithrombotic therapy in atrial fibrillation: American College of Chest Physicians Evidence-Based Clinical Practice Guidelines (8th Edition). *Chest* 2008; 133 (6 suppl): 546S.
5. AS Go. The ACTIVE pursuit of stroke prevention in patients with atrial fibrillation. *N Engl J Med* 2009; 360:2127.

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