

FOCUS ON RESEARCH

RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL OF LOW DOSE ASPIRIN IN THE PREVENTION OF CARDIOVASCULAR EVENTS AND DEATH IN SUBJECTS WITH ASYMPTOMATIC ATHEROSCLEROSIS

Researchers

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Aim

The aim of this trial is to determine in healthy people in the community who are at a higher than normal risk of developing cardiovascular disease whether aspirin can prevent heart attacks and strokes.

Project Outline/Methodology

The study is a randomised controlled trial in which nearly 30,000 men and women over 50 years of age who were free of cardiovascular disease were screened by measurement of their ankle and arm blood pressures. Those with a relatively low ankle pressure are known to be at higher risk of heart attacks and strokes and 3,350 were entered into the trial to receive low dose aspirin or a dummy tablet. During this present phase of the trial the subjects have been followed up to detect heart attacks and strokes by regular telephoning, contact with general practitioners and review of national hospital and mortality databases. Also subjects had a clinical examination 5 years after entering the trial.

Key Results

The follow up of subjects has been successful with contact being maintained with 95% of survivors and the 5 year clinical examination conducted on 85%. The number of heart attacks and strokes is as predicted. A detailed assessment has also been made of the extent to which subjects are taking their study tablets and the reasons for any drop out.

Conclusions

The follow up of subjects in the trial has continued as expected so that the trial is now on target to complete follow up at the end of 2009 with the main results to be reported in 2010.

What does this study add to the field?

There have been very few studies in healthy people of the effects of aspirin in preventing heart attacks and strokes, and the results are inconclusive. This study will add to this evidence but will also indicate whether it might be worthwhile screening people in the community to measure their ankle and arm blood pressures.

Implications for Practice or Policy

If aspirin does reduce the rate of heart attacks and strokes, consideration might be given to using measurement of ankle and arm blood pressures as a screening tool, perhaps as an addition to cardiovascular screening in general practice.

Where to next?

Completion of the trial in 2009/10 is the next step and funds are already in place to do this. At the same time, we are conducting other research examining the usefulness of the ankle brachial pressure measurement in combination with other risk factors in cardiovascular screening. The ultimate goal is to more accurately predict who will and will not have a heart attack and stroke and prevent this happening.

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