

HIPS/17/15 – Oral iron, Intravenous iron or discontinuation of therapy for older adults with treatment-unresponsive iron deficiency anaemia – a pilot randomised controlled trial

Anaemia due to low iron levels is common in older people and can cause tiredness and breathlessness. It is commonly treated with iron tablets. However, iron tablets do not improve anaemia in many people and they have side effects. We do not know what strategy of care is best for patients who do not respond to iron tablets: should we stop treatment, continue with tablets (which is current practice) or switch to iron given by a drip (intravenous iron)?

We will conduct a pilot randomised controlled trial to compare these three strategies of care. We will recruit 84 older people with iron deficiency anaemia who are not improving on iron tablets, and randomise them to receive one of the above three strategies of care for three months. Key outcomes will include: how long it takes to recruit enough people to the trial, which method(s) of recruitment (clinic, adverts or GP letters) is/are most efficient, and the improvement in haemoglobin level (a measure of anaemia) in each treatment arm. The results will allow us to plan a large, multicentre trial to find out which of the three options should become routine clinical care in this situation.