

LIPID CLINIC NEWS

Volume 23, Number 2
January 2008 SPECIAL EDITION

The Lipid Clinic is located in Suite 140, 1st floor of the Physicians' Pavilion at OHSU. **To make Lipid Clinic appointments, call: (503) 494 - 3273.** For dietitians (Nitza or Sonja) (503)-494-7775.

Lipid Clinic Staff: William Connor, MD; P. Barton Duell, MD; Bethany Klopfenstein, MD; Sonja Connor, MS, RD, LD; Nitza Bezzerides, RD, LD; Misty Warren, CMA. Lipid Clinic News Co-Editors: Sonja Connor, MS, RD, LD; Nitza Bezzerides, RD, LD

VYTORIN STUDY - WHAT'S UP?

Our phones have been ringing off the hook! This is because of stories in the press starting January 15 about the Enhance trial comparing Zocor (simvastatin) with Vytorin (simvastatin/ezetimibe).

The first article that appeared in The New York Times Monday, January 15 was "**Study Reveals Doubt on Drug for Cholesterol.**" The article concluded "Over the two years of the trial, patients who took Zocor alone reduced their LDL by 41 percent on average while patients who took Vytorin reduced their cholesterol by 58 percent. Yet despite the larger cholesterol reduction, patients taking Vytorin actually had more growth of fatty plaque in their carotid arteries than those on Zocor."

Lipid Clinic Docs Take on the Article

The writer of the article was not correct. The fatty plaque did increase in the carotid arteries that are in the neck. While it did increase slightly more in the Vytorin group (0.0111 mm) compared to the Zocor group (0.0058 mm), the difference was not statistically significant. This means the difference could be due to chance.

Another important point is that LDL cholesterol levels were 318 mg/dL (Zocor group) and 319 mg/dL (Vytorin group) at the beginning of the study. LDL cholesterol levels were lowered significantly more in the Vytorin group (134 mg/dL) than in the Zocor group (188 mg/dL).

There is a good reason why the fatty plaque increased in both groups. It is because the LDL cholesterol on treatment was considerably higher in both groups than the current goal of 70 mg/dL.

Also, the number of subjects (720) was relatively small for this type of study. This is why the drug companies (Merck and Schering-Plough) recently started two large clinical trials to find out if Vytorin will reduce heart attacks as Zocor has been proven to do.

This article was followed by an editorial in The New York Times Wednesday January 16 entitled "**Cholesterol Drug Bombs.**" The editorial said, "There are reasons to be cautious about interpreting these results. The number of patients was relatively small. And many of them may have used different drug treatments for years before entering the trial [about 80% were already taking statins], possibly diminishing the effectiveness of adding Zetia. ... The study showed that Vytorin reduced bad cholesterol significantly more than Zocor alone. The problem was that it failed to reduce the formation of plaque."

Lipid Clinic Docs Take on the Editorial

The LDL cholesterol levels were not lowered enough in either group to reduce the amount of plaque in the artery.

On Thursday January 17 yet another article appeared in The New York Times "**New Questions on Treating Cholesterol.**" This article said, "Despite widespread use of the drugs, though, heart disease remains the biggest killer in the United States and other industrialized nations, and many people still have cholesterol levels far higher than doctors recommend."

Lipid Clinic Docs Take on the Article

We agree the perfect therapy to prevent heart attacks has not been devised. In the meantime, we are doing our best to lower your LDL cholesterol and raise your HDL cholesterol as much as possible and control triglyceride levels – while keeping the side effects down and making sure the drugs are not causing more harm than good (there is a low risk of elevated liver enzyme levels, but this has been known since the drug was released).

Lipid Clinic Docs Recommendation

We think that Vytorin (simvastatin/Ezetimibe) and Zetia (ezetimibe) are still good LDL cholesterol-lowering drugs, that they are safe and we will continue to prescribe them.

Publication of this newsletter is supported by OHSU Department of Medicine and by educational grants from: Abbott Laboratories, AstraZeneca, Kaneka, Pfizer, Reliant, Sankyo and Schering-Plough. OHSU is an equal opportunity affirmative institution 0108