

More evidence emerges of benefits of NSAIDs to prevent Parkinson's disease

FURTHER evidence supporting the use of non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) to prevent Parkinson's disease emerged this week.

Researchers from Harvard medical school, Boston, Massachusetts, used data from two prospective population studies, involving more than 140,000 men and women, to examine the effect of NSAID use on Parkinson's disease risk.

They found that regular users of NSAIDs (other than aspirin) had a 45 per cent lower risk of developing the disease than non-users (relative risk 0.55, 95 per cent confidence interval, 0.32–0.96, $P=0.04$). Furthermore, the risk tended to decrease with increasing duration of regular use.

The researchers point out that similar risk reductions could have resulted if arthritis and other conditions for which NSAIDs are used were independently associated with Parkinson's disease. However, adjusting for these conditions had no effect on the results.

For aspirin users who took two or more tablets per day, a similar reduction in risk was observed (relative risk 0.56, 0.26–1.21).

Lower doses of aspirin, even if used regularly and for long periods, were not associated with a reduction in risk. "At lower dosages, aspirin has minimal anti-inflammatory effects. This may explain why regular use of aspirin (often taken at a low dosage to inhibit platelet aggregation) was not associated with [lower] Parkinson's disease risk," the researchers suggest (*Archives of Neurology* 2003;60:1059).

In an accompanying editorial (ibid, p1043), Dr Mya Schiess, University of Texas-Houston medical school says the study provides the best evidence to date for a clinically relevant benefit from NSAID use in preventing Parkinson's disease.

She estimates that 98 individuals would need to be treated with NSAIDs for 10 years to prevent one additional case of Parkinson's disease. She points out that this degree of benefit is similar to that reported for several other interventions that are widely accepted by health professionals and the public, including the use of tamoxifen to prevent recurrent breast cancer and the use of aspirin to prevent cardiovascular events.

High doses of aspirin were associated with a lower risk of Parkinson's disease

"[The] data suggest that further refinement of this intervention with specific anti-inflammatory agents and targeted populations may greatly magnify the potential therapeutic benefit," she concludes.

Boots tests compliance scratchcards

SCRATCHCARDS that serve as a reminder to patients of when to take the next dose of their medicines are being tested by Boots The Chemists.

Patients scratch off a panel on one of the Pill Prompt cards each time they take a dose. This reminds them when they last took a dose and thus when the next dose is due. Individual cards can be used for up to four weeks at a time and are available in one-, two-, three- or four-doses a day versions. The third week of the card is outlined in red as a reminder to reorder medication.

David Alexander, of Boots Dispensing Service, said: "Many people find it difficult to remember whether or not they have taken their medicine. We think that this scratchcard can help people keep track."

The Pill Prompt cards are on trial at Boots branches in Newark, Boston, Lincoln, Grantham, Market Rasen, Oundle, Bourne, Grimsby, Skegness, Stamford, Cleethorpes, Sleaford, Louth, Horncastle, Peterborough, March, Holbeach and Spalding. The cards are handed out free-of-charge from the pharmacy counter.

National Audit Office casts an eye over computing plan for England

THE National Audit Office is taking an initial look at the Department of Health's £2.3bn plan to improve information technology in the National Health Service in England, even before the project gets under way.

A spokesman for the NAO said that a number of people had written urging it to investigate the IT project. As a result, the NAO is exchanging correspondence with the Department of Health and the complainants. "This is not an unusual move," the spokesman said. "We are always looking at large Government projects." He added that a full audit of the project remains an option.

A spokeswoman for the DoH said that the Department would be co-operating with what is "an information-gathering exercise, not a full-scale inquiry".

Under the NHS national programme for IT, there will be a national application service provider (NASP) providing integrated care records for all NHS patients and a core information repository for these records, dubbed the NHS Spine. Local service providers (LSPs) will provide IT services, including hardware and software, for the NHS in England. Last week, the DoH announced short-listed bidders for the NASP and five regional LSP contracts. These include major telecommunications and IT companies such as BT, IBM, Fujitsu and SchlumbergerSema.

Electronic transmission of prescriptions now forms part of the NHS IT programme and could be part of the services provided by the successful bidders. Alternatively, the DoH might tender for this separately.

PJ Online

PJ Online contains the editorial contents of *PJ* publications.

Law and Ethics Bulletin

The bulletin is available online, from 2003 to date. Bulletins are listed by date, in alphabetical order and by subject. www.pjonline.com/lawandethics

Reunions

A list of reunions planned for this year and beyond. If you are planning one, you can e-mail details to reunions@pharmj.org.uk www.pjonline.com/reunions

Food and drink

Various food-related websites, plus links to nutrition articles and dietary advice. www.pjonline.com/links/food

Department of Health

The DoH website is huge. The links section on *PJ Online* has a partial list of its contents. These include

- Expert patients programme
- Chief Medical Officer
- Patient group directions
- NHS Direct

www.pjonline.com/links/doh

Conferences

Details of conferences, including the latest information on the British Pharmaceutical Conference.

www.pjonline.com/diary