

Pregabalin in Painful Diabetic Peripheral Neuropathy

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Pregabalin is a gabapentin derivative with superior antiallodynic and anticonvulsant activity for the equivalent dose. Three large, double-blind studies in a total of 729 randomised patients with painful diabetic peripheral neuropathy (DPN) provide convincing evidence that pregabalin 300 or 600 mg/day dosed three times daily is superior to placebo for alleviating this condition. Based on these studies, the estimated number needed to treat (NNT) for a 50% reduction in baseline pain score assessed on a visual analogue scale is between 3.2 and 4.2.

Inevitably, pregabalin will be judged against gabapentin, even if the latter is not licensed for treating DPN in the US. Simple NNT comparisons imply equivalent efficacy for pregabalin and gabapentin (NNT 3.6).^[1] Based on initial experience in the UK, where pregabalin has been launched for the treatment of peripheral neuropathic pain (includ-

ing DPN),^[2] its side effect profile is similar to that of gabapentin; however, gabapentin has the advantage of having already been widely prescribed without any known major safety concerns.

The eventual success of pregabalin for DPN can only be determined after prolonged clinical use. However, early indicators may emerge if clinicians are able to collate and share results as they accumulate. It will be especially important to collect and analyse data on the response to pregabalin in patients who have previously failed treatment with gabapentin. In the absence of head-to-head or even crossover trials, this will provide a surrogate measure of whether or not pregabalin is truly more efficacious than gabapentin.

References

1. Backonja M, Beydoun A, Edwards KR, et al. Gabapentin for the symptomatic treatment of painful neuropathy in patients with diabetes mellitus: a randomised controlled trial. *JAMA* 1998 Dec 2; 280 (21): 1831-6
2. PharmaTimes. Pfizer's Lyrica sees first launch [online]. Available from URL: <http://www.pharmatimes.com/news/15094d.asp> [Accessed 2004 Sep 15]