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Commentary

Antiretroviral Therapy in Asymptomatic HIV

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DESCRIPTION

Loss of $CD4^+$ T cells signifies the immunological compromise brought on by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). As the quantity of these cells in peripheral blood ($CD4^+$ count) decreases, the rates of HIV-related illnesses and fatalities rise. Antiretroviral medication is typically started later in asymptomatic patients with a $CD4^+$ count over a predetermined threshold. The relevant threshold has evolved over time, and various guidelines continue to make varying suggestions. Patients with a $CD4^+$ count of less than 500 cells per cubic millimetre have been enrolled in the majority of random studies that have evaluated the advantages and disadvantages. A $CD4^+$ count of 200 or 250 cells per cubic millimetre has been used as the definition of "later" in several studies. Strong support for the start of antiretroviral medication in patients with a $CD4^+$ count of 350 cells per cubic millimetre is shown by these results and observational studies.

Results from observational studies provide the majority of the evidence supporting the start of antiretroviral medication in patients with a $CD4^+$ count greater than 350 cells per cubic millimetre. The results of these research, however, are contradictory and prone to lingering confounding. The majority of studies have also largely ignored the risks and benefits of starting antiretroviral therapy in patients with a high $CD4^+$ count, in whom complications and death are largely attributed to non-AIDS-related events, and have instead concentrated only on the risks of the Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and death. Concerns concerning the negative consequences of antiretroviral medication on cardiovascular and renal disease have been raised by certain research, particularly in an elderly HIV-positive population. The constant use of anti-retroviral therapy, as opposed to intermittent therapy, however, lowered these risks in a previous large, randomized study.

It is crucial to determine whether it is safe and advantageous to start antiretroviral medication in asymptomatic individuals who have a $CD4^+$ count that is significantly greater than 350 cells per cubic millimetre, given the low absolute risk of AIDS among patients with a high $CD4^+$ count. Given that antiretroviral medication is known to reduce infectivity, this information is very crucial. Given the low absolute risk of AIDS in patients with high $CD4^+$ counts, it is crucial to determine whether it is safe and useful to start antiretroviral medication in asymptomatic individuals with a $CD4^+$ count that is significantly greater than 350 cells per cubic millimetre. Given the well-known advantages of antiretroviral medication in lowering infectivity, this knowledge is very crucial. Antiretroviral therapy was started earlier in HIV-positive adults with a $CD4^+$ count of more than 500 cells per cubic millimetre as compared to patients whose $CD4^+$ count had dropped to 350 cells per cubic millimetre. This resulted in net benefits.

CONCLUSION

The patients (4865) in all were monitored for a median of 3.0 years. At study entry, the median $CD4^+$ count was 651 cells per cubic millimetre, and the median HIV viral load was 12,759 copies per millilitre. The data and safety monitoring board decided on May 15, 2015, based on an interim analysis, that the research question had been resolved and advised that patients in the deferred-initiation group be given antiretroviral medication. In contrast to 96 patients in the deferred-initiation group (4.1%; 1.38 events per 100 person-years), 42 patients in the immediate-initiation group (1.8%; 0.60 events per 100 person-years) experienced the primary end point, yielding a hazard ratio of 0.43 (95% Confidence Interval [CI], 0.30 to 0.62; P0.001). The hazard ratios for major AIDS-related events were 0.28 (95% CI, 0.15 to 0.50; P0.001) and 0.61 (95% CI, 0.38 to 0.97; P=0.04), respectively. Patients having a $CD4^+$ count of more than 500 cells per cubic millimetre experienced more than two thirds of the key end goals (68%) in their cases. Both the chances of unplanned hospital admissions and the risks of a grade 4 occurrence were comparable across the two groups.

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