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Effectiveness of oseltamivir in adults and adolescents with seasonal influenza taking symptomatic therapy: a retrospective analysis of RCT data

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Aim:
To assess the effectiveness of oseltamivir in improving clinical symptoms of seasonal influenza when used in combination with over-the-counter (OTC) medications, compared with OTC medication alone.

Methods:
Data from patients aged 13–64 years with laboratory-confirmed influenza who participated in one of six randomised placebo-controlled studies of oseltamivir treatment (75mg b.i.d. for 5 days) and also took OTC analgesics (with or without other medications) were pooled for analysis. Two subgroups of this population were also analysed: those taking analgesics with cough/cold remedies, and those taking analgesics with antibiotics. Comparisons were made between oseltamivir-treated and placebo patients in the main population and each subgroup. The rate of improvement of seven clinical symptoms, two functional measures (sleep quality and ability to perform usual activities) and fever (body temperature) during days 1–6 of illness was calculated. The time to reach a defined tolerability threshold for each variable was compared by Kaplan–Meier analysis.

Results:
In the main analysis population (patients taking analgesics; n=1709; oseltamivir, 989; placebo, 720), six symptoms and both functional measures improved faster in oseltamivir-treated than placebo patients, including nasal congestion (difference in rate, 19.3%), cough (34.1%), sleep quality (13.7%) and ability to perform usual activities (12.0%). Fever improved at a similar rate for oseltamivir and placebo. Similar results were observed in the analgesics + cough/cold subgroup (n=635; oseltamivir, 373; placebo, 262). In the analgesics + antibiotics subgroup (n=175; oseltamivir, 97; placebo, 78), three symptoms and both functional measures improved faster in oseltamivir-treated than placebo patients. In the main group and both subgroups, the median time to reach a tolerable level of all measures was shorter in oseltamivir-treated patients than placebo patients.

Conclusions:
Patients taking oseltamivir in addition to OTC medications experienced a faster reduction in the severity of most influenza symptoms and a faster return to usual activities compared with patients who took OTC medications only.