

Low molecular weight heparin is more effective than vitamin K antagonists for venous thromboembolism in cancer patients

Clinical question	How effective and safe are low molecular weight heparin (LMWH) and anticoagulants such as vitamin K antagonists (VKA) for the long term treatment of venous thromboembolism (VTE) in patients with cancer?
Bottom line	For the long term treatment (up to 6 months) of VTE in patients with cancer, LMWH compared to VKA reduces venous thromboembolic events but not death. Both drugs have equal effects on death and the adverse risk of bleeding and thrombocytopenia. The decision to start long term LMWH versus oral anticoagulation for a patient with cancer and VTE should balance the benefits and downsides and integrate the patient's values and preferences for the important outcomes and alternative management strategies.
Caveat	The authors were unable to include a number of possibly relevant studies because the required data were not available. While LMWH decreases the incidence of VTE, it might be more costly and less acceptable because of the subcutaneous route of administration.
Context	The presence of cancer increases the risk of VTE four to six-fold. ¹ Patients with cancer might also respond differently to anticoagulants compared with patients without cancer. LMWH is given by injection, whereas VKA is given orally.
Cochrane Systematic Review	Akl EA et al. Anticoagulation for the long term treatment of thromboembolism in patients with cancer. Cochrane Reviews 2008, Issue 1. Article No. CD006650. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD006650.pub2. This review contains 8 studies involving 3986 participants.
PEARLS 97, September 2008, written by Brian R McAvoy	

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners. They are funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group.

PEARLS provide guidance on whether a treatment is effective or ineffective. PEARLS are prepared as an educational resource and do not replace clinician judgement in the management of individual cases.

View PEARLS online at:

- www.cochranepriarycare.org



PEARLS

Practical Evidence About Real Life Situations

[References]

1. Heit J A et al. Arch Intern Med 2000;160:809–815.



**COCHRANE
PRIMARY HEALTH
CARE FIELD**

PEARLS are succinct summaries of Cochrane Systematic Reviews for primary care practitioners. They are funded by the New Zealand Guidelines Group.

PEARLS provide guidance on whether a treatment is effective or ineffective. PEARLS are prepared as an educational resource and do not replace clinician judgement in the management of individual cases.

View PEARLS online at:

- www.cochraneprimarycare.org