ARTEMETHER with LUMEFANTRINE (Comment)

The arrival of a new dispersible tablet

A tablet that contains 20 mg of artemether and 120 mg of lumefantrine (Co-artem®, Novartis Pharma AG) has been available since 2004 and this can be used, once crushed and added to 10 ml of water, when treating young children with malaria. Indeed it has become the most effective and most widely used product in many parts of Africa in the last few years, even though it has quite a bitter taste.

The company have now developed a cherry-flavoured dispersible tablet which makes it much easier to treat young children, and tested this in a single-blind randomised non-inferiority trial. The results of this trial, which had involved 812 children weighing between 5 and 35 kg from five African countries with proven acute uncomplicated plasmodium falciparum malaria, were finally published on-line in the *Lancet* on October 15th 2008. It showed that the new formulation was at least as effective as the older one – the 28 day, PCR confirmed, cure rate was 98·8% in those given the new formulation and 98·5% in those given the original formulation. More importantly there have been concerns that the drug could be neurotoxic and ototoxic and might also cause cardiac problems, but no evidence of toxicity was encountered during this carefully monitored study (which involved a simple 3-day six-dose treatment regimen). As an accompanying commentary says "The use of dispersible tablets will potentially enhance and promote better treatment outcomes, and delay the development of drug resistance at the same time".

Reference

Abdulla S, Sagara I, Borrmann S, *et al.* Efficacy and safety of artemether-lumefantrine dispersible tablets compared with crushed commercial tablets in African infants and children with uncomplicated malaria: a randomised, single-blind, multicentre trial. *Lancet* 2008;372:1819–27. [RCT] (See also Editorial 1786–7.)

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