Duration of intravenous antibiotic therapy for children with acute osteomyelitis or septic arthritis: a feasibility study

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Published September 2017
DOI: 10.3310/hta21480
Plain English summary

IV antibiotic therapy in children with OM or SA
Health Technology Assessment 2017; Vol. 21: No. 48
DOI: 10.3310/hta21480

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Plain English summary

Children’s bone and joint infections are treated first with intravenous antibiotics and then oral antibiotics. Historically, long courses of intravenous antibiotics were thought to be needed, which often involve a long hospital stay. At present there is no consensus regarding how long to treat these infections overall, or how long to use each of intravenous or oral antibiotics. This study used a combination of methods to assess if a clinical trial to reduce intravenous antibiotics in children will be feasible in the UK.

Data were collected from 44 UK centres to find out the current bacterial causes of children’s bone and joint infections and how these are treated in clinical practice. A qualitative study explored families’ views and experiences of having had a child treated for bone or joint infection. A consensus meeting was informed by information from the clinical data collection, web-based clinician survey and qualitative study to establish the final set of outcomes, oral switch criteria and overall future trial feasibility.

We found that clinicians are already switching from intravenous to oral antibiotics at an early stage in selected patients with simple disease, even though there is not yet formal clinical trial evidence of the safety of doing so. This has important implications both for current practice and for the feasibility of different potential trial designs. We also found that a future randomised controlled trial of shorter or longer courses of intravenous antibiotics would be feasible by including only children who need more than a minimum of 7 days’ intravenous antibiotic treatment before switching to oral medicine.
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This report

The research reported in this issue of the journal was funded by the HTA programme as project number 10/146/01. The contractual start date was in March 2013. The draft report began editorial review in January 2016 and was accepted for publication in November 2016. The authors have been wholly responsible for all data collection, analysis and interpretation, and for writing up their work. The HTA editors and publisher have tried to ensure the accuracy of the authors’ report and would like to thank the reviewers for their constructive comments on the draft document. However, they do not accept liability for damages or losses arising from material published in this report.

This report presents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). The views and opinions expressed by authors in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health. If there are verbatim quotations included in this publication the views and opinions expressed by the interviewees are those of the interviewees and do not necessarily reflect those of the authors, those of the NHS, the NIHR, NETSCC, the HTA programme or the Department of Health.

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