Chantix Is Effective at Getting HIV-Positive Smokers Off Cigarettes

Researchers recommend the medication for smoking cessation in this population based on results from a recent trial.

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People living with HIV who smoke can look to the medication Chantix (varenicline) as a safe and effective way to quit cigarettes, Healio reports. About one in seven of those who received the drug in a recent study were able to get off cigarettes during a yearlong follow-up period, compared with about one in 16 of those who received a placebo.

Smoking, which is two to three times more common among HIV-positive individuals compared with the general population, is especially hazardous for those living with the virus. Cigarette use is responsible for an estimated one fifth of cancers in the HIV population. One recent study concluded that those living with HIV who smoke and are medically well cared for lose far more years of life to cigarettes than to the virus. Another recent study found that those HIV-positive individuals who quit smoking slash their risk of numerous cancers.

For the new study, French researchers from the Phase III randomized ANRS 144 Inter-ACTIV trial, randomly assigned 248 HIV-positive smokers to receive Chantix or a placebo. Both groups also received face-to-face smoking cessation counseling. The investigators conducted the trial between October 2009 and December 2012 and published their findings in The Lancet HIV.

The participants all smoked at least 10 cigarettes per day for one year or longer, were motivated to quit smoking, were not dependent on another substance and had no history of depression or suicide.

Those who received Chantix were first given the drug for 12 weeks. Then they received 13 weeks of smoking cessation counseling. Those who had gone back to smoking by the end of this period were offered another 12 weeks of Chantix.

The participants' cigarette use was monitored with a breath test that detects carbon monoxide.

Fifteen percent of those who received Chantix got off and stayed off cigarettes through the end of the study's 48-week observation period, compared with 6 percent of those who received the placebo, meaning that Chantix was associated with a 2.5-fold increased likelihood of successfully

kicking the smoking habit.

The study authors stated that they believe Chantix should be the standard of care for aiding smoking cessation among people living with HIV.

To read the Healio article, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

[[poll|210]]

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