Quit-Smoking Drug Works Among People With HIV

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The smoking cessation aid Chantix (varenicline) works about as well among people with HIV as those without, although less than a fifth of those taking the drug in a recent trial actually quit smoking, MedPage Today reports. The ANRS 144 Inter-ACTIV study in France enrolled 248 HIV-positive smokers who were looking to quit and who were taking antiretroviral treatment. They randomized the participants to receive Chantix or a placebo for 12 weeks, instructing them to begin quitting smoking during the first two weeks of the study. They presented their findings at the 2015 Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Seattle.

Thirty-six weeks after the end of the treatment period, 17.6 percent of those taking Chantix and 7.2 percent of those on the placebo remained off of cigarettes. Previous research showed a respective 23 percent and 10 percent quit rate among HIV-negative people taking the drug or the placebo.

Chantix proved safe and well tolerated. The most frequent side effects were nausea, abdominal pain and sleep disorders. The drug did not negatively affect viral load or CD4 count.

Nine of the participants taking Chantix experienced grade 3 or 4 side effects related to the drug. Five were depressive episodes and the other four were nightmares. Such severe psychiatric side effects were similarly common among the placebo group.

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