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**BBC**

**New drug found for irregular heart beats**

Patients with irregular heart beats could benefit from a drug that is easier to administer than the current standard treatment.

The condition, which affects about 800,000 people in the UK, can lead to blood clots forming and significantly increases the risk of stroke.

The standard treatment, warfarin, was compared with the drug rivaroxaban.

Rivaroxaban was found to be as effective as warfarin in reducing the risk of stroke.

The study was led by Edinburgh University and the Duke University in North Carolina, North America.

Stroke can be four to six times higher in patients with irregular heart beats.

Both drugs work by reducing the clotting of the blood but, as a result, can increase the risk of bleeding.

The impact of warfarin can be affected by other medications and diet, so patients taking it must be closely monitored to ensure they are receiving the correct dose.

Rivaroxaban does not need to be so closely monitored, nor the dose adjusted, the study found.

'Too frail'

Researchers studied 14,000 patients with irregular heat beats and at risk of stroke, a condition known as atrial fibrillation, who were given either warfarin or rivaroxaban.

The study also found the incidence of bleeding was similar for both drugs.

The risk of fatal bleeding on the brain was halved (from five per 1,000 to approximately two per 1,000) among patients taking rivaroxaban.

Atrial fibrillation can affect adults of any age, but is more common as people get older, affecting about 10% of over-65s.

Professor Keith Fox, from Edinburgh University, said: "We know that about a third of patients eligible for warfarin are not currently receiving it.

"This may be because they are too frail and may not be able to manage taking the drug appropriately, with the need for blood tests and dosage levels to be monitored closely.

"This study shows that an alternative drug for patients with irregular heart beats is just as effective while also easier to prescribe and take."

The study is published in the New England Journal of Medicine.

**REUTERS**

**Bayer anti-clot drug gets cautious journal welcome**

Wed Aug 10, 2011 10:00pm BST

By Ben Hirschler

An anti-clotting pill from Bayer ([BAYGn.DE](http://uk.reuters.com/business/quotes/overview?symbol=BAYGn.DE)) and Johnson & Johnson offers a new way of preventing stroke although further studies will be needed to refine treatment options, according to a review in a top medical journal.

Wednesday's editorial in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) will be read closely by doctors and industry analysts, who have been grappling with results from a difficult-to-interpret clinical trial of Xarelto.

Gregory Zoppo of the University of Washington, and Misha Eliasziw of the University of Calgary, said the mix of statistical analyses used to assess the once-daily drug had "muddied the waters" over its benefits.

Xarelto, known generically as rivaroxaban, was hailed last November as being 21 percent better at preventing stroke in patients with a form of irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation (AF) than the standard treatment, warfarin.

But this conclusion was based on an analysis that excluded certain patients. When all those who entered the trial were evaluated, no superiority was established for Xarelto.

"I think we can say safely that rivaroxaban is not inferior to warfarin.

I don't think we can say it is superior," Zoppo said in a telephone interview.

"Non-inferiority is not a bad thing."

The editorial also highlighted the fact warfarin, which requires patients to have regular blood tests to ensure correct dosing, was not used as effectively as it might have been in the study.

And the authors said an "important concern" was that new anticoagulants such as Xarelto did not have antidotes to rapidly reverse their anti-coagulation effects in the event of serious bleeding.

Patients on warfarin can be given vitamin K.

The full results of the so-called ROCKET-AF study were published in the NEJM alongside the editorial.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has approved Xarelto for preventing blood clots after knee and hip surgery, and it is expected to decide whether to approve it in the much larger stroke-prevention market later this year.

A similar drug called Pradaxa, or dabigatran, from Boehringer Ingelheim is on the market and several others are under development, including apixaban from Bristol-Myers Squibb and Pfizer .

All aim to replace warfarin, a problematic drug, in the lucrative market for millions of mainly elderly patients with AF.

Zoppo said their arrival was a notable advance.

"What's really exciting about rivaroxaban and dabigatran is now we have some alternatives to warfarin that are relatively easy to take and their control seems to be pretty straightforward," he said.

"Is everybody going to switch from warfarin?

I think the answer is 'No'.

Patients who are managed very well on warfarin should stay on it."

He said there was scope for further trials looking at the relative merits of existing drugs and other, even newer ones still in earlier stages of development.

The Mirror

August 11, 2011 Thursday   
3 Star Edition

**HOPE OVER HEART PILL**  
**BYLINE:** LACHLAN MACKINNON  
  
**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. 16  
  
**LENGTH:** 147 words

HEART disease sufferers could get a safer drug than standard blood thinning medication.

People with irregular heartbeats are usually given warfarin to prevent clots forming and causing strokes, but it can react with other drugs and is not ideal for frail, elderly patients.

But rivaroxaban is twice as effective at blocking fatal brain bleeds and has fewer side effects, experts from Edinburgh University and North Carolina's Duke University found.

Around 800,000 people suffer from irregular heartbeats which could make them up to six times more likely to suffer strokes, caused by a blood flow interruption to the brain.

Edinburgh University's Prof Keith Fox said: "An alternative drug for patients with irregular heartbeats is just as effective while also easier to prescribe and take."

Irregular heartbeats affect about 10% of over-65s, the New England Journal of Medicine report added.

The Scotsman

August 11, 2011, Thursday   
1 Edition

**New drug gives hope to heart patients**  
**BYLINE:** Lyndsay Buckland Health correspondent  
  
**SECTION:** Pg. 11  
  
**LENGTH:** 300 words

Scottish researchers have found that patients with heart problems could benefit from a new drug, which reduces their risk of life-threatening complications.

Patients with atrial fibrillation (AF), which causes an irregular heartbeat, are currently treated with the blood-thinning drug warfarin to reduce the risk of blood clots and stroke.

Now, a new global study, led by the University of Edinburgh and the Duke University in North Carolina, has compared the effects of warfarin with the drug rivaroxaban.

The new treatment was found to be as effective as warfarin, but the risk of suffering fatal bleeding on the brain was halved in patients taking the newer treatment.

Both drugs work by reducing the clotting of the blood, but, as a result, this can increase the risk of bleeding.

Patients taking warfarin must be closely monitored to ensure they are receiving the correct dose.

Rivaroxaban does not need to be so closely monitored.

The researchers, writing in the New England Journal of Medicine, studied 14,000 patients with irregular heatbeats.

While the risk of a bleed generally in the body was the same for both treatments, rivaroxaban had other benefits for patients, including the lower risk of deadly bleeds on the brain.

Professor Keith Fox, at Edinburgh, said: "We know that about a third of patients eligible for warfarin are not currently receiving it.

This may be because they are too frail and may not be able to manage taking the drug appropriately, with the need for blood tests and dosage levels to be monitored closely.

This study shows that an alternative drug for patients with irregular heartbeats is just as effective while also easier to prescribe and take."

While experts have welcomed the new treatments, some have warned that the drugs will add tens of millions to the NHS bill.