Cinacalcet: benefit and cost

Sir,

Fukagawa et al. have confirmed the efficacy of cinacalcet in reducing the serum concentrations of parathyroid hormone (PTH) in long-term dialysis patients [1]. Their paper leaves some questions unanswered. Notably, one can legitimately question whether the expense of cinacalcet is worthwhile [2,3].

But, if the use of cinacalcet leads to improved quality or quantity of life, then this drug may indeed be useful for chronic dialysis patients. However, the data presented in this paper do not appear to show better quality or quantity of life in those on cinacalcet. In fact, there was a greater occurrence of nausea in those on cinacalcet compared to placebo.

Leaving expense and quality of life aside, if cinacalcet could provide a ‘medical’ parathyroidectomy, then it might have some use. Considering the vintage of the subjects in this paper, one might expect a substantial occurrence rate of parathyroidectomy in subjects on long-term dialysis for 7 years [4]. But there do not appear to be data on parathyroidectomy rates in the present paper by Fukagawa et al. Perhaps longer follow-up may show such an effect of cinacalcet. Even if it did, quality of life and survival data would be very important in deciding on the cost–benefit ratio of this expensive medication.

Conflict of interest statement. None declared.

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doi: 10.1093/ndt/gfm747

Reply

Sir,

In his letter to the editor [1] on our recent paper [2], Dr Cohen pointed out very important issues in the evaluation of the beneficial effects of cinacalcet, as yet unsolved in our study. We are currently unable to provide answers to these issues, due to the fact that cinacalcet has not yet been introduced to the Japanese market. In addition to the differences of medical care system, the economical benefits [3,4] would be mostly dependent on the price of cinacalcet in Japan; this has not been determined yet, as of September 2007.

Furthermore, it will take several years to evaluate the effects of cinacalcet on quantity and quality of life [5]. Among these, the frequency of surgical parathyroidectomy may also be influenced by the differences in management policies and indications for parathyroidectomy in recent clinical guidelines, including ours [6]. Well-designed long-term clinical studies are required to answer these problems.

Conflict of interest statement. MF and TA are members of advisory committee for the clinical trials of cinacalcet in Japan.

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doi: 10.1093/ndt/gfm794

Advanced Access publication 9 December 2007

Cinacalcet, fetuin-A and interleukin-6

Sir,

We read with interest the article by Messa et al., demonstrating that cinacalcet increases osteoprotegerin (OPG) and decreases fetuin-A serum levels, with no changes of interleukin-6 (IL-6) values [1].

Advanced Access publication 8 December 2007