

ONCE-DAILY VALACICLOVIR REDUCES TRANSMISSION OF GENITAL HERPES

PATEL R¹, SACKS S², TYRING S³, PAAVONEN J⁴, STRATCHOUNSKY L⁵,
PÖDER A⁶, WADDELL R⁷, HARRIS J⁸, COREY L⁹.

¹Southampton University Hospital, Southampton, UK; ²Viridae Clinical Sciences and University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada; ³University of Texas, Galveston, Texas, USA; ⁴University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland; ⁵Smolensk State Medical Academy, Smolensk, Russia; ⁶Clinic of Dermatology, Tartu University, Tartu, Estonia; ⁷Sexually Transmitted Diseases Services, Adelaide, South Australia, Australia; ⁸GlaxoSmithKline R&D, Greenford, UK; ⁹University of Washington, Seattle, Washington, USA.

Background: Transmission of genital herpes to a sexual partner is a major concern to patients. Daily valaciclovir suppresses genital herpes clinical recurrences and herpes simplex virus (HSV) shedding. We investigated the efficacy of once-daily valaciclovir suppressive therapy in the source partner for reducing genital herpes transmission to the susceptible partner in heterosexual, monogamous, HSV-2 discordant couples.

Methods: In a randomised double-blind study, HSV-2 seropositive source partners with a history of < 10 episodes/year received valaciclovir 500 mg once daily or placebo for 8 months. HSV-2 seronegative susceptible partners were monitored monthly for acquisition of genital herpes. Couples were offered condoms and counselled on safer sexual behaviour at all visits. The primary endpoint was the proportion of susceptible partners with a first episode of symptomatic genital herpes (confirmed by HSV-2 culture, PCR or seroconversion). All endpoints were ratified by a committee.

Results: 1484 couples participated in the study. 741 source partners received placebo and 743 received valaciclovir. 488 susceptible partners were women and 996 were men. Sixteen (2.2%) subjects in the placebo, versus four (0.5%) in the valaciclovir group acquired symptomatic genital herpes (relative risk = 0.25, 95% CI 0.08, 0.74, $p = 0.011$), a 75% reduction in the risk. Twenty-seven (3.6%) of placebo versus 14 (1.9%) of valaciclovir-treated partners transmitted genital HSV-2 infection (measured by laboratory-confirmed symptoms or seroconversion). At any time the risk of transmitting HSV-2 infection was reduced by 48% (hazard ratio = 0.52, 95% CI 0.27, 0.99, $p = 0.039$). Adverse events were similar in nature and frequency between treatment groups.

Conclusions: Once-daily valaciclovir suppressive therapy significantly reduces the transmission of genital herpes among heterosexual HSV-2 discordant couples. This is the first randomised controlled trial of an antiviral demonstrating a reduction in sexual transmission of an infection.