BEST EVIDENCE TOPIC REPORTS
Towards evidence based emergency medicine: best BETs from the Manchester Royal Infirmary
Edited by K Mackway-Jones

Best evidence topic reports (BETs) summarise the evidence pertaining to particular clinical questions. They are not systematic reviews, but rather contain the best (highest level) evidence that can be practically obtained by busy practising clinicians. The search strategies used to find the best evidence are reported in detail in order to allow clinicians to update searches whenever necessary. The BETs published below were first reported at the Critical Appraisal Journal Club at the Manchester Royal Infirmary or placed on the BestBETs web site. Each BET has been constructed in the four stages that have been described elsewhere. The BETs shown here together with those published previously and those currently under construction can be seen at http://www.bestbets.org.

Five BETs are included in this issue of the journal together with another five that inform the accompanying accumulator BET.

- Accuracy of negative urine analysis in ruling out urinary tract infection in adults
- Venous blood gas in adult patients with diabetic ketoacidosis
- Antithrombotic treatment of below knee deep venous thrombosis
- Buccal nitrates in left ventricular failure
- Oral methionine compared with intravenous n-acetylcysteine for paracetamol overdose

Accumlator BET
- Clinical probability scoring and pulmonary embolism
- Accuracy of combining clinical probability score and simplified D-dimer for diagnosis of pulmonary embolism
- IL D-dimer test in the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism
- Outpatient investigation of pulmonary embolism
- Outpatient treatment of pulmonary embolism

Accuracy of negative dipstick urine analysis in ruling out urinary tract infection in adults

Report by Nick Ohly, Senior House Officer
Checked by Stewart Teece, Clinical Research Fellow

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish whether negative dipstick urine analysis is sensitive enough to rule out urinary tract infection (UTI) in adults with urinary symptoms. Altogether 75 papers were found using the reported search, of which two presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario
A 20 year old student presents to the emergency department with a three day history of urinary frequency, dysuria, and lower abdominal pain. Examination is unremarkable and dipstick urine analysis is normal. You wonder whether normal dipstick urine analysis is sufficient to rule out a UTI or whether antibiotics anyway should be prescribed whatever the result.

Three part question
In [adults with symptoms of a urinary tract infection] does [negative dipstick urine analysis] rule out a [UTI]?

Search strategy
Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. [(exp Urinary Tract Infections OR exp Indicators and Reagents OR exp Reagent Strips OR stix.af OR urinalysis.af) AND (exp Urinary Tract Infections OR (urine§ adj5 infect§).af OR UTI.af OR exp Bacteriuria OR bacteriur§.af) AND (dysuria.af OR frequency.af OR haematuria.af OR hematuria.af OR stranguria.af OR urgency.af)] LIMIT to human AND English language AND all adult <19 plus years>

Search outcome
Altogether 75 papers were found. Of these, two were identified as answering the three part question. One of these was a meta-analysis containing nine papers not identified by the original search as they did not consider dipstick urine analysis (table 1).

Comment(s)
The meta-analysis shows that the prevalence of UTI in patients who present with symptoms of UTI is around 50%. The probability of UTI is even higher (around 90%) with a convincing history. Dipstick urine analysis is a quick and inexpensive test however sensitivity (and therefore negative...
predictive value) were found to be as low as 75%. Some stud-
ies included in the meta-analysis were of low quality and fur-
ther studies need to be done in this field.

**CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE**

Dipstick urine analysis is of insufficient sensitivity to be used
to rule out UTI in patients with one or more symptoms.

**Report by Ziauddin Hassan, Devasena M Subramonyam, Registrars**

**Checked by Shobhan Thakore, Specialist Registrar**

**Abstract**

A short cut review was carried out to establish whether venous
good measurement accurately demonstrates the degree of
acidosis in patients with diabetic ketoacidosis. A total of 27
papers were found using the reported search, of which two
presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question.
The author, date and country of publication, patient group
studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study
weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bot-
ton line is stated.

**Clinical scenario**

A 22 year old insulin dependent diabetic presents to our
emergency department with a raised blood sugar and urine
dipstick showing +++ of ketones. You suspect diabetic
ketoacidosis and would like to know the degree of his acido-
sis, but the patient refuses arterial blood gas sampling due to
a previous bad experience. You wonder whether venous blood
would accurately show the degree of his metabolic acidosis.

Three part question

In [an adult patient with diabetic ketoacidosis] do [venous
blood gases] accurately demonstrate [the degree of acidosis]?

**Search strategy**

Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. [(venous
blood.mp OR exp blood specimen collection OR exp blood gas
analysis) AND (exp diabetic ketoacidosis OR diabetic ketoac-
dosis.mp OR exp diabetic coma) AND (exp acidosis OR acido-
sis.mp OR exp hydrogen-ion concentration)] AND LIMIT to
human AND English language.

**Search outcome**

Altogether 27 papers were found of which only two are
relevant and of sufficient quality for inclusion (table 2).

**Comment(s)**

There are only a limited number of studies on this subject and
these have involved small numbers of patients. Further stud-
ies with large series of patients are necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Author, date and country</th>
<th>Patient group</th>
<th>Study type (level of evidence)</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Key results</th>
<th>Study weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lammers RL et al, 2001, USA</td>
<td>331 adult women presenting to ED or intermediate care centre with more than one symptom of a UTI. Positive dipstick defined as detectable nitrite or leucocyte esterase. Prevalence 45.9%. Gold standard urine culture</td>
<td>Prospective observational study</td>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>Only women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>NPV</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td>No sample size analysis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Bent S et al, 2002, USA</td>
<td>Adult women from nine original studies involving patients with symptoms of an UTI presenting to outpatient clinics. Total number of patients 2331. Positive dipstick defined as detectable nitrite or leucocyte esterase. Prevalence 48%. Gold standard of positive urine culture</td>
<td>Meta-analysis</td>
<td>Sensitivity</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>Some studies only included women</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Likelihood of UTI in presence of dysuria and frequency without vaginal discharge is high</td>
<td>&gt;90%</td>
<td>Only able to use data from some studies</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Difference in cut off level for positive urine culture (range 100–100,000 CFU/ml)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Some studies of poor quality</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2</th>
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</table>
Antithrombotic treatment of below knee deep venous thrombosis

Report by Kerstin Hogg, Clinical Research Fellow

Checked by Andrew Ashton, Senior Clinical Fellow

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish whether oral anticoagulation is necessary to prevent pulmonary embolisation in patients with below knee deep venous thrombosis. A total of 425 papers were found using the reported search, of which 11 presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario
A 50 year old man attends the emergency department with a plethoric, swollen left calf. Ultrasound examination reveals a posterior tibial vein thrombosis. You wonder what the risk of a pulmonary embolus is and whether he should be anticoagulated.

Three part question
In [a patient with a below knee venous thrombosis], is [oral anticoagulation necessary] to prevent [a pulmonary embolus]?

Search strategy
Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. {[(DVT.mp OR exp venous thrombosis OR “deep vein thrombosis”.mp) AND (“below knee”.mp OR calf.mp OR popliteal.mp OR exp popliteal vein OR fibular.mp OR peroneal.mp OR posterior tibial.mp) OR “deep calf venous thrombosis”.mp OR “calf vein thromb”.mp) AND (therapy.mp OR exp therapeutics OR treatment.mp OR exp heparin OR exp heparin, low-molecular-weight OR heparin.mp OR exp warfarin OR warfarin.mp OR exp coumarins OR coumarin.mp)] LIMIT to human and English.

Search outcome
Altogether 425 papers were found, only 10 original papers and one literature review addressed the question. Some studies included other patients with PE or thigh DVTs—only the patients with calf thrombosis are described (table 3).

Comment(s)
All of these studies could have been more thorough in their diagnostic criteria and/or follow up. However, despite the flaws it is clear that pulmonary emboli do result from below knee thrombi.

Buccal nitrates in left ventricular failure

Report by Dhurga Gnanasegaram, Senior Clinical Fellow

Checked by Jon Argall, Senior Clinical Fellow

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish whether buccal and intravenous nitrates are equally effective at preload reduction in patients with left ventricular failure. Seven papers were found using the reported search, of which one presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of this best paper is tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario
You are called to see a 60 year old man who has been increasingly breathless for a week. Examination reveals him to be cyanosed, plethoric, with a dilated, thready left femoral arterial pulse. There is evidence of ischaemia on his ECG. The chest radiograph shows upper lobe diversion and Kerley B lines. You wonder whether buccal suscard would be an appropriate alternative to a GTN infusion.

Three part question
In [a patient with left ventricular failure] are [buccal nitrates equivalent to a nitrate infusion] for [preload reduction]?

Search strategy
Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. {[(exp nitrates OR nitrate.mp OR exp nitroglycerin OR nitroglycerin.mp OR exp vasodilator agents OR GTN.mp OR glycyril trinitrate.mp OR exp isosorbide dinitrate OR isoset.mp OR Sustard.mp) AND ((buccal.mp OR exp mouth mucosa OR exp administration, buccal) AND (exp injections, intravenous OR intravenous.mp OR IV.mp)) AND (exp heart failure, congestive OR heart failure.mp OR LVF.mp OR left ventricular failure.mp OR congestive cardiac failure.mp OR exp ventricular dysfunction, left OR exp ventricular dysfunction OR exp pulmonary oedema)] LIMIT to human AND English language.

Search outcome
Altogether seven papers were found, of which five were reviews of nitrates rather than comparative studies. The two...
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, date and country</th>
<th>Patient group</th>
<th>Study type (level of evidence)</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Key results</th>
<th>Study weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phillbrick JT et al, 1988, USA</td>
<td>All studies of sufficient quality identified from literature search over years 1944 to 1986</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Incidence PE</td>
<td>6 of 163 patients receiving no anticoagulation (Strength of evidence weak). 9 of 208 patients receiving a range of anticoagulation (0 of 32 in only study with strong evidence, all other studies, weak)</td>
<td>No controlling of postmortem procedures—unclear if all legs veins thoroughly examined.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giachino A, 1988, Canada</td>
<td>152 patients who died in Ottawa hospitals over a five year period, with PE listed as the cause of death.</td>
<td>Retrospective study</td>
<td>Source of thrombosis in fatal pulmonary emboli.</td>
<td>82 had no postmortem examination. 23 postmortem examinations confirmed PE as the cause of death, and identified the source of the emboli. Of 3 of 23 postmortem examinations revealed the calf veins as the source of the thrombi. 15% propagated to involve the popliteal or larger veins. A further 17% propagated within the calf veins.</td>
<td>Only 23 of 152 considered to die from PE actually had a PM and had the source of the embolus confirmed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohr J et al, 1991, USA</td>
<td>75 patients with ultrasound diagnosed calf thrombosis. Treatment left to physician’s discretion.</td>
<td>Prospective study with follow up serial ultrasound examination.</td>
<td>Thrombosis propagation</td>
<td>75 of 139 thrombi propagated Publishing bias—the cohort appears to include all of the patients included in the previous Lohr study (see study in this table) Paper does not establish rate of PE Gold standard venography not used Publishing bias—all of these patients may have been included in the study by Pellegrini V et al, 1993.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Pellegrini V et al, 1993, USA</td>
<td>25 patient with isolated calf DVT and 12 patients with superficial or muscular calf thrombosis, diagnosed by venography on postoperative screening of total hip arthroplasty patients. Only 12 calf DVTs and one superficial/muscular calf thrombosis were anticoagulated</td>
<td>Prospective study following up at 6, 12, 24 and 52 weeks</td>
<td>Incidence of PE</td>
<td>4 of 13 untreated calf DVT patients were diagnosed with PE. 0 of 1 treated calf DVT patient and none of the superficial/muscular calf thrombosis developed PE.</td>
<td>No information regarding the length of follow up, or the effect of varying therapies Two of the PEs were diagnosed on the strength of sudden collapse and cardiac arrest—no postmortem examination carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nielsen HK et al, 1994, Denmark</td>
<td>15 patients with venographically diagnosed calf DVTs.</td>
<td>Prospective study</td>
<td>VQ scan result at presentation</td>
<td>5 of 15 had positive VQ scans No information regarding exact criteria for diagnosing PE from VQ scan alone—probable over-estimation of incidence VQ scans were performed at 10 and 60 days, however no information regarding the breakdown of subsequent PEs between proximal and isolated calf DVT groups. Publishing bias—the cohort appears to include all of the patients included in the previous Lohr study (see study in this table) Paper does not establish rate of PE Gold standard venography not used Publishing bias—all of these patients may have been included in the study by Pellegrini V et al, 1993.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lohr JM et al, 1995, USA</td>
<td>192 patients with ultrasound diagnosed below knee DVTs, Treatment left to physicians discretion.</td>
<td>Prospective study with serial ultrasound for four weeks</td>
<td>Thrombus propagation</td>
<td>53 of 139 thrombi propagated “Outcome” of isolated calf thrombosis. 3 patients presented initially with a “positive” VQ scan. One fatal PE within the first month.</td>
<td>No information regarding which symptoms would prompt investigations for PE Method’s description implies that a VQ scan result of intermediate probability would diagnose PE—no information as to how this PE was diagnosed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O’Shaughnessy AM et al, 1997, Ireland</td>
<td>50 patients with ultrasound diagnosed DVTs, 43 treated with anticoagulation and 7 without</td>
<td>Prospective study, using repeat ultrasound at one week, one month, six months and one year.</td>
<td>“Outcome” of isolated calf thrombosis.</td>
<td>2 of 56 patients not receiving anticoagulant therapy had PE 1d 227 receiving anticoagulant therapy had documented extension to thigh DVT No information regarding anticoagulant therapy for patient with extension to thigh DVT. 28 patients were not followed up for the full six months as they died Diagnosis did not always use venography No information regarding which symptoms would prompt investigations for PE Method’s description implies that a VQ scan result of intermediate probability would diagnose PE—no information as to how this PE was diagnosed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gottlieb RH et al, 1999, USA</td>
<td>238 patients with ultrasound diagnosed below knee DVTs</td>
<td>Retrospective study</td>
<td>Incidence of diagnosed PEs Incidence of extension into thigh DVT</td>
<td>2 of 56 patients not receiving anticoagulant therapy had PE</td>
<td>No information regarding exact criteria for diagnosing PE from VQ scan alone—probable over-estimation of incidence VQ scans were performed at 10 and 60 days, however no information regarding the breakdown of subsequent PEs between proximal and isolated calf DVT groups. Publishing bias—the cohort appears to include all of the patients included in the previous Lohr study (see study in this table) Paper does not establish rate of PE Gold standard venography not used Publishing bias—all of these patients may have been included in the study by Pellegrini V et al, 1993.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finidei L et al, 2001, France</td>
<td>105 patients with calf DVTs treated for six weeks with warfarin, 92 patients with calf DVTs treated for 12 weeks with warfarin</td>
<td>Prospective study</td>
<td>Incidence of PE</td>
<td>1 of 197 (patient from 12 week warfarin group) had documented PE</td>
<td>No information regarding which symptoms would prompt investigations for PE Method’s description implies that a VQ scan result of intermediate probability would diagnose PE—no information as to how this PE was diagnosed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schwarz T et al, 2001, Germany</td>
<td>84 patients with isolated calf muscle thrombosis. 52 received LMWH for 10 days, 32 received no anticoagulation</td>
<td>Prospective cohort with serial ultrasound examinations</td>
<td>Progression to deep veins of calf PE Thrombus propagation PE</td>
<td>Study discontinued as 8 of 32 non-anticoagulated patients progressed to deep vein thrombosis, compared with 0 of 52 anticoagulated patients None None</td>
<td>Gold standard venography not used VQ scan results interpreted in isolation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharpe RP et al, 2002, USA</td>
<td>85 trauma patients with below knee DVTs</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>PE Thrombus propagation PE</td>
<td>4 of 85 thrombi propagated proximally 1 of 85 did not propagate but had a PE</td>
<td>Gold standard investigations not applied for DVT or PE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
remaining publications consisted of a summary report and full article relating to the same trial. The results of this trial are shown in table 4.

Comment(s)
There is very limited evidence available to allow direct comparison between intravenous and buccal routes.

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE
Buccal nitrates produce an immediate reduction in preload (comparable with intravenous GTN).


Oral methionine compared with intravenous n-acetyl cysteine for paracetamol overdose

Report by Walid Alsalim, Specialist Registrar
Checked by Mohamed Fadel, Specialist Registrar

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish whether methionine was better than n-acetyl cysteine at reducing the severity of liver damage after paracetamol overdose. Thirty nine papers were found using the reported search, of which two presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario
A 19 year old woman brought to the emergency department six hours after paracetamol overdose. She is fully conscious and admits ingestion of 32 tablets of paracetamol. She is complaining of abdominal discomfort but no nausea or vomiting. Her examination is unremarkable. You arranged blood investigations. Intravenous access and n-acetyl cysteine infusion started as per protocol. You wonder whether oral methionine would have been as effective as n-acetyl cysteine in her treatment.

Three part question
In a [patient with paracetamol overdose within eight hours] is [methionine as good as or better than n-acetyl cysteine] at [reducing liver damage]? 

Search strategy

Search outcome
Alltogether 39 papers were found, of which two were relevant (table 5).

Comment(s)
There have been no randomised controlled trials and only two prospective observational studies comparing these two drugs. However, patients in these two studies had the antidote within eight hours.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, date and country</th>
<th>Patient group</th>
<th>Study type (level of evidence)</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Key results</th>
<th>Study weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Verma SP et al, 1989, UK</td>
<td>36 male patients with acute LVF secondary to recent MI (&lt;10 hours) in CCU</td>
<td>PRCT</td>
<td>Left heart filling pressures</td>
<td>All three groups reduced</td>
<td>Only 36 patients</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV v buccal v transdermal GTN</td>
<td>Cardiac output</td>
<td>No reduction in any group</td>
<td>3 patients had BP falls in buccal group but with no clinical deterioration</td>
<td>Different doses of buccal, IV and dermal GTN (based on previous studies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average doses over 90 min: IV 12.9 mg, buccal 5 mg, dermal 20 mg</td>
<td>BP</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vale JA, 1981, UK</td>
<td>158 patients with paracetamol overdose. Mean age: 26 y: 1:2 M:F ratio</td>
<td>Prospective observational</td>
<td>Liver damage: Methionine within 10 h (n=96)</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>No randomisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High risk patients defined as paracetamol level: &gt;300 mg/l at 4 h.</td>
<td></td>
<td>IV n-acetylcysteine within 10 h (n=62)</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>Small study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In high risk patients methionine within 10 h (n=43)</td>
<td></td>
<td>in high risk patients IV n-acetylcysteine. within 10 h (n=33)</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>2 of 7 vomited the first dose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prescott LF, 1981, UK</td>
<td>104 patients with paracetamol overdose. Mean age 33 y: 1:1.5 M:F ratio</td>
<td>Prospective observational</td>
<td>Liver damage: Methionine. Within 10 h, (n=42) 57% of them were high risk</td>
<td>NSD</td>
<td>No randomisation</td>
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<td>High risk patients defined as paracetamol level: &gt;300 mg/l at 4 h.</td>
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<td>7%</td>
<td>Small study</td>
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<td>33 of 62 (53%) of them were high risk</td>
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</table>

www.emjonline.com
Clinical probability scoring and pulmonary embolism

Report by Ged Brown, Specialist Registrar
Checked by Kerstin Hogg, Clinical Research Fellow

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish the diagnostic utility of clinical probability scoring in stratifying the risk of pulmonary embolus. A total of 938 papers were found using the reported search, of which three presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario
A 30 year old man presents to the department with a spontaneous onset of atraumatic pleuritic chest pain. He has no previous medical history and has no shortness of breath or haemodynamic compromise. You wonder whether his clinical features and risk factors can help to safely exclude a pulmonary embolus.

Three part question
In [a patient presenting with features suggestive of pulmonary embolus] what is [the diagnostic utility of clinical probability scoring] in [stratifying risk of pulmonary embolus]?

Search strategy
Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. (exp Pulmonary Embolism OR exp Thromboembolism OR PE.mp OR pulmonary embolus.mp OR Pulmonary Embolism Embol calibrated.mp AND (exp Risk Assessment OR risk assessment.mp OR risk stratification.mp OR probability.mp)) LIMIT to human AND English language.

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE
Intravenous acetylcysteine (parvolex) is more effective than methionine at preventing liver damage in patients after paracetamol overdose.


Accuracy of combining clinical probability score and simpliRED d-dimer for diagnosis of pulmonary embolism

Report by Russell Boyd, Consultant
Checked by Kerstin Hogg, Clinical Research Fellow

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish whether bedside clinical examination and simpliRED D-dimer are...
sufficiently sensitive to rule out pulmonary embolus. A total of 272 papers were found using the reported search, of which five presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario
A 34 year old woman presents with a two day history of pleuritic chest pain. There are no abnormal physical signs and her only risk factor is that she is taking oral contraceptives long term. You wonder if a combination of clinical examination and the available d-dimer test (SimpliRED) would be suitable to rule out pulmonary embolism.

Three part question
In [suspected PE] is [bedside clinical examination and SimpliRED d-dimer] sufficiently sensitive at [ruling out PE]?

Search strategy

Search outcome
Altogether 272 papers were identified of which five were relevant and of sufficient quality. These are shown in table 7.

Comment(s)
Use of a bedside clinical decision rule for PE probability with the additional use of latex agglutination d-dimer testing results in high levels of sensitivity and high negative predictive values in the low PE risk groups. It is this group of patients that makes up the bulk of patients with a putative diagnosis of PE. However, latex agglutination d-dimers do not perform well in high or even moderate risk groups.

> CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE
Patients at low clinical risk with a negative bedside d-dimer can have pulmonary embolus ruled out.

<table>
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<th>Study type (levels of evidence)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ginsberg JS et al, 1998, Canada</td>
<td>1250 consecutive referred patients to teaching hospital thromboembolic clinic with putative diagnosis of PE (73 lost to follow up)</td>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Diagnostic utility of a combination of low clinical probability of PE on clinical assessment with -ve SimpliRED d-dimer</td>
<td>Negative predictive value of 99%</td>
<td>Exclusion criteria “lost” 484 of original 1881 patients screened then further 147 excluded because of non-consent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells PS et al, 2000, Canada</td>
<td>1211 patients with presumptive diagnosis of PE broken into derivation and validation set</td>
<td>Diagnostic test</td>
<td>Sensitivity of clinical decision rule with addition of SimpliRED latex agglutination test E</td>
<td>87.8%–88.3% (validation-derivation)</td>
<td>Actual methodology not fully demonstrated, for example, gold standard definition predictive values and likelihood ratios not given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farrell S, 2000, USA</td>
<td>198 patients presenting to US ED with suspected thromboembolic disease</td>
<td>Diagnostic test</td>
<td>Diagnostic utility of a combination of low clinical probability of PE on clinical assessment with –ve SimpliRED d-dimer</td>
<td>Negative predictive value 97%</td>
<td>Estimation of clinical probability was with implicit not explicit methods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MacGillavry MR, 2001, Netherlands</td>
<td>404 adults, both in and outpatients in teaching hospitals with putative diagnosis of thromboembolic disease</td>
<td>Diagnostic test</td>
<td>Sensitivity and specificity of using a clinical probability and SimpliRED d-dimer test</td>
<td>Sensitivity 98% Specificity 11%</td>
<td>Over 50% exclusion rate for entry into study Implicit methods only for determining clinical probability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wells P, 2001, Canada</td>
<td>946 adult patients referred for assessment of PE</td>
<td>Cohort</td>
<td>Diagnostic utility of a combination of low clinical probability of PE on clinical assessment with –ve SimpliRED d-dimer</td>
<td>Negative predictive value 99.5%</td>
<td>Investigation protocol violations occurred in nearly 10% of the patients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IL d-dimer test in the diagnosis of pulmonary embolism

Report by Kerstin Hogg, Clinical Research Fellow

Checked by Russell Boyd, Consultant

Abstract
A short cut review was carried out to establish whether a negative IL d-dimer test alone could be used to rule out a diagnosis of pulmonary embolus. Six papers were found using the reported search, of which four presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of these best papers are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

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Clinical scenario
A 30 year old woman presents to the emergency department with distressing, left sided pleuritic chest pain. She may have had a pulmonary embolism and you request a D-dimer test. You know the laboratory in your hospital uses the D-dimer test alone and wonder whether a normal result would be sufficiently sensitive to rule out a pulmonary embolus.

Three part question
In a [patient with suspected pulmonary embolus] does a [negative IL D-dimer test] adequately [rule out the diagnosis]?

Search strategy
Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVD interface. ([D-dimer.mp or exp Fibrin Fibrinogen Degredation Products or FDP.mp] AND [IL test.mp] AND [exp Thromboembolism or exp Pulmonary Embolism or pulmonary embol$.mp or PE.mp or pulmonary infarct$.mp or exp venous thromboembolism]).

Search outcome
Six papers were found from the above search. Four were relevant. One further paper was found from hand searching journals and references. These five papers are shown in table 8.

Comments
To date there have been few studies measuring the accuracy of this D-dimer test. Of note, there is almost no research looking in particular at patients presenting with symptoms of PE. The sensitivity of the IL test for ruling out DVT seems to lie somewhere between 90% and 100%. It is worth noting that all of these studies used a comparatively low cut off level and it is worth being aware what the cut off level is in your hospital laboratory.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author, date and country</th>
<th>Patient group</th>
<th>Study type (level of evidence)</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Key results</th>
<th>Study weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legani C et al, Italy 1999</td>
<td>105 consecutive outpatients with DVT</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>ROC curve to define max sensitivity of IL test</td>
<td>230 ng/ml cut off sensitivity 100% specificity 77.2%</td>
<td>Patients DVT not PE High prevalence DVT. Would not reflect an average emergency department population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>van der Graaf F, 2000</td>
<td>99 DVT outpatients. Comparison of three different IL D-dimer tests</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>IL test</td>
<td>Sensitivity 90% Specificity 78%</td>
<td>Patients DVT not PE High prevalence of DVT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villa P et al, Spain 2000</td>
<td>86 patients with a moderate or high clinical suspicion of DVT</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>Sensitivity Specificity IL test using 255 ng/ml cut off</td>
<td>98.4% 33.3%</td>
<td>Patients suspected of having DVT not PE Cohort had high prevalence DVT Venography not used</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harper P et al, New Zealand 2001</td>
<td>235 patients presenting to emergency department with DVT</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>Sensitivity IL test (250 mg/ml cut off) and SimpliRED Specificity IL test and SimpliRED</td>
<td>94.1% 66% 51.5% 75.6%</td>
<td>All patients presented as DVT not PE The gold standard venogram not used in diagnosis DVT All patients underwent ultrasound (USS), but not all underwent more than one. Probable under-estimation of DVT prevalence Patients were simply advised to return to the department if symptoms did not settle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kovacs MJ et al, Canada 2001</td>
<td>All patients with suspected DVT (468 patients) or PE (525 patients), presenting to four hospitals</td>
<td>Prospective cohort</td>
<td>Sensitivity of SimpliRED, IL test and Accuclot Specificity of SimpliRED, IL test and Accuclot</td>
<td>80% 91% 79% 74% 91% 76%</td>
<td>Results combined for DVT and PE patients Cut-off level of 200 ng/ml was used for IL test [much lower than most labs]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

▶ CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE
The IL D-dimer test alone is not sufficiently sensitive to rule out pulmonary embolus. It must be used in conjunction with another test.

Outpatient investigation of pulmonary embolism

Report by Kerstin Hogg, Clinical Research Fellow

Checked by Debbie Dawson, Clinical Research Nurse

Abstract

A short cut review was carried out to establish whether outpatient investigation of suspected pulmonary embolus is a safe strategy. A total of 198 papers were found using the reported search, of which one presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of this best paper are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario

A 38 year old man presents to the emergency department with left posterior pleuritic chest pain. He had a DVT eight years ago and his d-dimer levels are raised. He is haemodynamically stable with normal oxygen saturations, ECG, and chest radiograph. You would like to rule out a pulmonary embolism, but it is 8 pm. You wonder whether it would be safe to discharge the patient home overnight before his VQ scan tomorrow.

Three part question

In a [patient with suspected pulmonary embolism] is [outpatient investigation] [safe]?

Search strategy

Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. [(pulmonary embol$.mp OR exp Pulmonary Embolism OR PE.mp OR exp Pulmonary infarct$.mp) AND (diagnosis.mp OR exp Diagnosis) AND (outpatient.mp OR exp Outpatients OR clinic.mp OR exp Outpatient clinics, hospital)] LIMIT to human AND English.

Search outcome

Altogether 198 papers were found, one of which looked at outpatient investigation of patients with suspected PE. This is shown in table 9.

Comments

This is the only published study looking at outpatient investigation of PE and is small. Further research is needed.

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE

It may be safe to investigate selected patients with suspected pulmonary embolus at home.

Bauld DL et al, Canada, 1999

Outpatient treatment of pulmonary embolism

Report by Kerstin Hogg, Clinical Research Fellow

Checked by Debbie Dawson, Clinical Research Nurse

Abstract

A short cut review was carried out to establish whether outpatient treatment of patients with pulmonary embolus is a safe strategy. Sixty six papers were found using the reported search, of which one presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of this best paper are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

Clinical scenario

A 38 year old man presents to the emergency department with left posterior pleuritic chest pain. He had a DVT eight years ago and his d-dimer levels are raised. He is haemodynamically stable with normal oxygen saturations, ECG, and chest radiograph. You would like to rule out a pulmonary embolism, but it is 8 pm. You wonder whether it would be safe to discharge the patient home overnight before his VQ scan tomorrow.

Three part question

In a [patient with suspected pulmonary embolism] is [outpatient treatment] [safe]?

Search strategy

Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. [(pulmonary embol$.mp OR exp Pulmonary Embolism OR PE.mp OR exp Pulmonary infarct$.mp) AND (diagnosis.mp OR exp Diagnosis) AND (outpatient.mp OR exp Outpatients OR clinic.mp OR exp Outpatient clinics, hospital)] LIMIT to human AND English.

Search outcome

Altogether 66 papers were found, one of which looked at outpatient treatment of patients with suspected PE. This is shown in table 10.

Comments

This is the only published study looking at outpatient investigation of PE and is small. Further research is needed.

CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE

It may be safe to investigate selected patients with suspected pulmonary embolus at home.
search, of which one presented the best evidence to answer the clinical question. The author, date and country of publication, patient group studied, study type, relevant outcomes, results and study weaknesses of this best paper are tabulated. A clinical bottom line is stated.

**Clinical scenario**
A 40 year old woman presents to the emergency department with pleuritic chest pain. She comments that she has had “cramp” in her left leg since discharge from the surgical ward after hysterectomy. Her ventilation-perfusion scan shows a high probability of pulmonary embolism. You have scored her as a high clinical probability of PE and therefore diagnose pulmonary embolic disease. She is comfortable, has normal oxygen saturations and is keen to return home to her family. You wonder whether treating her as a outpatient would be a safe option.

**Three part question**
Is it [safe] to treat a patient with [pulmonary embolic disease] as an [outpatient]?

**Search strategy**
Medline 1966–04/03 using the OVID interface. [(pulmonary embol$.mp OR exp Pulmonary Embolism OR PE.mp OR exp Thromboembolism OR pulmonary infarct$.mp) AND (treatment.mp OR exp Therapeutics OR LMWH.mp OR exp Heparin, Low-Molecular-Weight OR low molecular weight.mp OR exp Anticoagulants) AND (outpatient.mp OR exp Outpatients OR clinic.mp OR exp Outpatient clinics, hospital)] LIMIT to human AND English.

**Search outcome**
Altogether 282 papers were found, of which three were relevant (table 10).

**Comment(s)**
There are no large studies validating this approach to the treatment of pulmonary embolism.

**CLINICAL BOTTOM LINE**
It may be safe to treat a low risk group of patients with pulmonary embolic disease at home.

Accumulator BET: a traumatic pleuritic chest pain

Prepared by K Hogg, G Brown, K Mackway-Jones