



Oral corticosteroids for post-infectious cough in adults: A double-blind randomised placebo-controlled trial in Swiss family practices (OSPIC)

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The project is a cooperation of the institutes for Family Medicine of Basel, Lucerne and St. Gallen

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Background: Cough is one of the most common causes for seeking medical advice in general practices. Post-infectious cough is defined as lasting 3 to 8 weeks after an upper respiratory tract infection (URTI). It can be very bothersome, disabling in daily activities with substantial impact on physical and psychosocial health, leading to impaired quality of life (QoL). Recommendations for the management of post-infectious cough in primary care are scarce and incoherent. Thus, a high quality RCT assessing the benefits and harms of orally administered corticosteroids for post-infectious cough is needed.

Aim: To assess whether a 5-day treatment with oral corticosteroids provides patient-relevant benefits by improving the cough-related QoL and reducing the duration and intensity of post-infectious cough in adult primary care patients.

Methods: The proposed study is a pragmatic, multicentre, 1:1 randomised, parallel-group, placebo-controlled, superiority trial with blinded patients, general practitioners (GP), and outcome assessors in a primary health care setting. We plan to include 204 patients aged 18 or older seeing their GP for a cough lasting 3 to 8 weeks following an URTI. Any concurrent disease such as pneumonia, asthma, COPD, gastroesophageal reflux disease, allergic rhinitis, or cancer will be ruled out before trial inclusion. Patients in the intervention group will receive oral corticosteroid treatment (equivalent of 40 mg prednisone once daily) for 5 days and patients in the control group receive placebo for 5 days.

Importance: This will be the first RCT investigating whether oral corticosteroids are beneficial and safe in patients with post-infectious cough, which would have a substantial impact on the well-being and management of these patients in Switzerland and beyond.

GPs will be recruited through existing research networks by the Centre for Primary Health Care, University of Basel, the Institute of Primary and Community Care, University of Lucerne, and the research network of Hausarztmedizin, Cantonal Hospital of St. Gallen.

Time period: start 2019, end 2021