

Priorities Forum Statement

Number	56
Subject	Chelation therapy in the treatment of cardiovascular disease, autism and chronic fatigue syndrome
Date of decision	February 2016
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GUIDANCE

Chelation provides a means of removing heavy metals from the body. In addition to their use in the treatment of heavy metal poisoning and overload, there is a growing trend for chelating agents to be used to treat a variety of different conditions. These include cardiovascular disease, autism and chronic fatigue syndrome. The efficacy and safety of chelation therapy as used in these circumstances are not well established.

A literature review was conducted to identify studies investigating the benefits of chelation therapy for cardiovascular disease, autism and chronic fatigue syndrome. Safety concerns relating to the use of chelation for the above indications were also considered.

Of seven randomised controlled trials looking at the use of chelation therapy in the treatment of cardiovascular disease, two appeared to show a benefit. Both of these studies had significant methodological limitations, as did two small, uncontrolled studies which suggested a benefit of the use of chelation therapy in the treatment of autism. Two studies reporting an improvement in fatigue following chelation therapy also had methodological shortcomings.

As with any drug, there are side-effects associated with the use of chelating agents. Internationally, there have been reports of deaths following administration of a particular agent.

Recommendation

Overall, there is a lack of evidence for the efficacy of chelation therapy in the treatment of cardiovascular disease, autism and chronic fatigue syndrome. Taken in conjunction with the risk of serious side effects and even death, the use of chelation cannot presently be recommended other than for the treatment of heavy metal poisoning or overload.

The need for chelation therapy following exposure to heavy metals is determined on biochemical and clinical grounds. The diagnosis and treatment of heavy metal toxicity should take place at, or under the direct supervision of, a recognised tertiary centre.

Human Rights and Equalities Legislation has been considered in the development of this guidance.