

SUMMARY AND COMMENT | INFECTIOUS DISEASES, HOSPITAL MEDICINE, GENERAL MEDICINE, AMBULATORY MEDICINE

INFORMING PRACTICE

December 2, 2022

Zinc for Patients with COVID-19?

Daniel Kaul, MD, reviewing Ben Abdallah S et al. Clin Infect Dis 2022 Nov 4

In a randomized, blinded, multicenter study in Tunisia, oral zinc demonstrated a beneficial effect on COVID-19 progression, particularly in hospitalized patients with severe disease.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, initial reports of improved outcomes with various repurposed drugs or vitamins (e.g., vitamin C, hydroxychloroquine) have not been confirmed in larger randomized studies. Now, investigators report results of a randomized trial of zinc. Between February 15 and May 4, 2022, 470 patients presenting to the COVID-19 triage area at five hospitals in Tunisia were randomized to 15 days of oral zinc (25 mg twice daily) or placebo. Patients with severe comorbidities, need for assisted ventilation, or >7 days of symptoms were excluded. Mean age was 54, 60% required supplemental oxygen at enrollment, and 23% had received at least one dose of COVID-19 vaccine.

At 30 days, the primary composite outcome (ICU admission or death) occurred in 10.4% and 16.7% of the zinc and placebo groups, respectively. Length of hospital stay was 3.5 days shorter in zinc recipients. Ambulatory patients who received zinc reported shorter duration of symptoms, but no reduction in need for hospital admission.

COMMENT

Most COVID-19 trials enroll either hospitalized patients with severe disease or outpatients with mild to moderate disease. This study included both groups, making interpretation more challenging. Performing a confirmatory study would be difficult as high rates of death and ICU admission are not now occurring. I'm not ready to recommend zinc for hospitalized patients with COVID-19 (and I certainly would not recommend it in lieu of proven treatments for COVID-19 of any severity), but for patients or clinicians who wish to try zinc in addition to other recommended treatments, there's probably little downside — and now some scientific justification.

CITATIONS

Ben Abdallah S et al. Twice-daily oral zinc in the treatment of patients with coronavirus disease 2019: A randomized double-blind controlled trial. *Clin Infect Dis* 2022 Nov 4; ciac807; [e-pub]. (<https://doi.org/10.1093/cid/ciac807>)

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