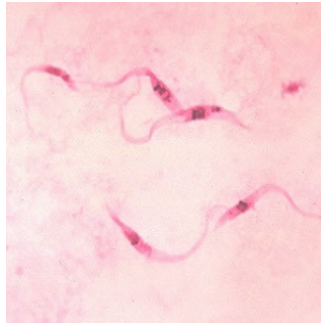


The BENEFIT Trial: Accelerating Diagnosis, Treatment and Research



According to an article published in *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases* by the Global Chagas Disease Coalition, without a more efficient treatment, more than 200,000 people living with Chagas disease will die from heart disease in the next five years.

The conclusion is based on the findings from the international, multicenter, double-blind and placebo-controlled "Benznidazole Evaluation for Interrupting Trypanosomiasis" (BENEFIT) trial that was initiated more than 10 years ago to determine whether the estimated 1.2 million people now living with chronic Chagas heart disease could benefit from treatment with benznidazole.

The study findings show that the answer is no and highlight that there is a need to initiate treatment at earlier stages of the disease. No incremental benefits in cardiac outcome were observed which lead the authors to question the current strategies of using anti-parasitic chemotherapy in patients with chagasic heart disease.

Approximately 17 to 18 percent of the patients in the treated and placebo arms died over a period of five years. This suggests that around 200,000 people will die from Chagas cardiomyopathy within the next five years. This figure is comparable to women who will die from breast cancer during the same time period. But in contrast to breast cancer, Chagas disease enjoys very little advocacy or support for research and development.

The BENEFIT trial thus emphasises on the need to determine the best dosing schedule for benznidazole and the development of reliable surrogate markers to predict clinical outcomes. It also highlights the need to address other issues such as co-infections and non-communicable diseases in patients infected with *Trypanosoma cruzi*.

"The newest information coming from the BENEFIT trial highlights the urgency to develop improved therapeutics for millions of people now living with Chagas disease" said Professor Peter Hotez, senior author of the article and Dean of the National School of Tropical Medicine at Baylor College of Medicine. "We urgently need to redouble our efforts to identify and treat young people who are still in the early stages of their illness, but ultimately we need to find better treatments and new cures", emphasize the authors.

Source: *PLOS Neglected Tropical Diseases*

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