E-ISSN 2250-0944

ISSN 2250-1150
doi: 10.48047/ijprt/15.01.192

Efficacy of Proton Pump Inhibitors vs. H2-Receptor Antagonists in GERD Patients: A Double-Blind RCT

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Abstract

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is prevalent globally, necessitating effective therapeutic strategies. This double-blind randomized controlled trial compared the efficacy and safety of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) and histamine-2 receptor antagonists (H2RAs) in GERD management. A total of 200 adult patients with endoscopy-confirmed GERD were randomized to receive either pantoprazole 40 mg or ranitidine 300 mg daily for eight weeks. The primary outcome was symptom relief measured by the GERD Symptom Assessment Scale (GSAS), while secondary outcomes included esophageal healing assessed via endoscopy and adverse event profiles. Results

demonstrated that the PPI group achieved a significantly greater reduction in GSAS scores (mean reduction: 65.4 ± 12.3) compared to the H2RA group (mean reduction: 42.7 ± 10.8; $p < 0.001$). Endoscopic healing was observed in 89% of the PPI group versus 62% in the H2RA group ($p < 0.001$). Adverse events were mild and comparable between groups. This study underscores the superior efficacy of PPIs over H2RAs in symptom control and mucosal healing in GERD patients, providing robust evidence to guide clinical decision-making.

Keywords: GERD, Proton Pump Inhibitors, H2-Receptor Antagonists

Introduction

Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD) is a chronic condition characterized by the retrograde flow of gastric contents into the esophagus, leading to symptoms such as heartburn and regurgitation. The global prevalence of GERD has been increasing, with significant implications for healthcare systems due to its impact on quality of life and potential for complications like esophagitis and Barrett's esophagus.[1-3]

The pathophysiology of GERD involves a complex interplay between transient lower esophageal sphincter relaxations, impaired esophageal clearance, and delayed gastric emptying. These mechanisms contribute to mucosal damage and symptom manifestation. Management strategies aim to alleviate symptoms, promote mucosal healing, and prevent complications.[4-6]

Pharmacological interventions remain the cornerstone of GERD treatment. Proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) and histamine-2 receptor antagonists (H2RAs) are the primary classes of acid-suppressive agents used. PPIs, such as pantoprazole, irreversibly inhibit the H+/K+ ATPase enzyme system, leading to profound and prolonged acid suppression. H2RAs, like ranitidine, competitively inhibit histamine at H2 receptors of the gastric parietal cells, resulting in decreased acid secretion. [7-9]Recent studies have highlighted the superior efficacy of PPIs over H2RAs in symptom relief and mucosal healing. A network meta-analysis by Barberio et al. demonstrated that PPIs were more effective than H2RAs in achieving symptom relief in patients with endoscopy-negative reflux

disease . Furthermore, Meng et al. reported that pantoprazole was among the most efficacious treatments in the initial non-eradication therapy of duodenal ulcers.[10-13]

However, concerns regarding the long-term safety of PPIs have emerged, including potential risks of chronic kidney disease, nutrient malabsorption, and alterations in gut microbiota . These concerns necessitate a balanced consideration of benefits and risks in the selection of acid-suppressive therapy. [14-15]

Given the evolving landscape of GERD management and emerging safety data, this study aims to provide a comprehensive comparison of the efficacy and safety profiles of PPIs and H2RAs in a randomized controlled setting, thereby informing clinical practice and optimizing patient outcomes.

Methodology

This double-blind randomized controlled trial was conducted at a Sahiwal Teaching hospital Sahiwal tertiary care center from January to December 2024. The study protocol was approved by the institutional ethics committee, and verbal informed consent was obtained from all participants.

Eligible participants were adults aged 18–65 years with endoscopy-confirmed GERD presenting with typical symptoms for at least three months. Exclusion criteria included prior gastrointestinal surgery, concurrent use of acid-suppressive therapy, pregnancy, lactation, and significant comorbidities such as hepatic or renal impairment.

Sample size calculation was performed using Epi Info software, considering a 20% difference in symptom relief between groups, with a power of 80% and a significance level of 5%, resulting in a required sample size of 100 patients per group.

Participants were randomized into two groups using a computer-generated sequence. Group A received pantoprazole 40 mg once daily, and Group B received ranitidine 300 mg once daily, both for eight weeks. Medications were dispensed in identical capsules to maintain blinding.

Baseline assessments included demographic data, symptom evaluation using the GERD Symptom Assessment Scale (GSAS), and upper gastrointestinal endoscopy. Follow-up assessments were conducted at four and eight weeks, including repeat GSAS scoring and endoscopy at the study's conclusion.

The primary outcome was the change in GSAS scores from baseline to eight weeks. Secondary outcomes included the rate of endoscopic healing and the incidence of adverse events. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0. Continuous variables were expressed as mean ± standard deviation and compared using the Student's t-test. Categorical variables were compared using the chi-square test. A p-value of <0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

Table 1: Baseline Demographic and Clinical Characteristics

Parameter	PPI Group (n=100)	H2RA Group (n=100)	p-value
Age (years)	45.2 ± 10.1	44.8 ± 9.8	0.72
Male (%)	52	50	0.78
BMI (kg/m²)	26.5 ± 3.2	26.8 ± 3.5	0.56
Duration of symptoms (months)	6.2 ± 1.5	6.4 ± 1.6	0.48

Table 2: Symptom Relief and Endoscopic Healing

Outcome	PPI Group (n=100)	H2RA Group (n=100)	p-value
Mean GSAS score reduction	65.4 ± 12.3	42.7 ± 10.8	<0.001
Endoscopic healing (%)	89	62	<0.001

Table 3: Adverse Events

Adverse Event	PPI Group (n=100)	H2RA Group (n=100)	p-value
Nausea (%)	5	4	0.73
Headache (%)	3	2	0.65
Diarrhea (%)	2	1	0.56

Explanation: The baseline characteristics were comparable between groups, ensuring homogeneity. The PPI group demonstrated significantly greater symptom relief and higher rates of endoscopic healing compared to the H2RA group. Adverse events were mild and did not differ significantly between groups.

Discussion

The present study provides compelling evidence favoring the use of proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) over histamine-2 receptor antagonists (H2RAs) in the management of gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD). The superior efficacy of PPIs in symptom relief and mucosal healing aligns with findings from previous studies, reinforcing their role as the cornerstone of GERD therapy. [16-17]

Barberio et al. conducted a network meta-analysis demonstrating the superiority of PPIs over H2RAs in achieving symptom relief in patients with endoscopy-negative reflux disease . Similarly, Meng et al. reported that pantoprazole was among the most efficacious treatments in the initial non-eradication therapy of duodenal ulcers.[18-20]

The enhanced acid suppression achieved by PPIs, through irreversible inhibition of the H+/K+ ATPase enzyme system, likely accounts for the observed superior clinical outcomes. In contrast, H2RAs provide a less potent and shorter duration of acid suppression, which may be insufficient for optimal mucosal healing in GERD patients.[21-22]

Despite the efficacy of PPIs, concerns regarding their long-term safety have been raised. A study by Zhang et al. highlighted that PPIs have a greater impact on the gut microbiome and oral-to-gut

transmission than H2RAs, potentially increasing the risk of certain diseases associated with prolonged PPI use.[23-25]

Conclusion

This study reinforces the superior efficacy of PPIs over H2RAs in symptom control and mucosal healing in GERD patients. However, the potential long-term adverse effects associated with PPIs necessitate a balanced approach to therapy selection. Future research should focus on the long-term safety profiles of acid-suppressive agents and the development of novel therapies with improved efficacy and safety.

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