Reviewer’s report

Title: Is a combination of varenicline and nicotine patch more effective in helping smokers quit than varenicline alone? A randomised controlled trial.

Version: 1 Date: 20 February 2013

Reviewer: Kenneth A Perkins

Reviewer’s report:

Despite improved smoking quit rates provided by varenicline treatment, a majority of smokers receiving varenicline fail to maintain abstinence at follow-up, justifying a search for further improvements in this treatment. This study compared efficacy of varenicline combined with nicotine patch vs placebo patch to determine whether adding NRT may further improve quit rates due to varenicline alone. Results clearly indicated no added benefit of NRT patch over effects of varenicline alone, on quit rates as well as withdrawal symptoms or adverse effects. The conclusion that adding NRT patch to varenicline does not increase abstinence is well supported by the results of this study.

This was a very well-done and clearly-described trial, with appropriate procedures and assessments. The quit rates appear very reasonable, indicating a solid cessation intervention by which to effectively test adding NRT patch as an adjunct intervention. The exploratory analysis of those who may not have been responding to varenicline (i.e. did not reduce cigarettes/day by at least 50%) was interesting and a positive addition to trying to understand these results. The paper itself is excellent, with a solid rationale presented in the Introduction and clearly noted Methods and Results. Findings in the tables are effectively presented. In sum, this is a very nice contribution to the clinical literature on smoking cessation.

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare I have no competing interests.