CORRESPONDENCE

Nedocromil sodium effective treatment for asthma

To the Editor:

We wish to respond to the recent editorial [1] concerning our paper entitled "The clinical efficacy of inhaled nedocromil sodium (Tilade®) in the treatment of asthma" [2]. We would like to emphasize certain statements made in the paper: we included all placebo-controlled, double-blind trials that have been supplied and analysed by Fisons. We were not selective in any way other than to exclude centres (not studies) that contributed less than nine patients per treatment group. The results presented gave a fair and unbiased assessment of nedocromil sodium compared with placebo.

We have conducted an additional analysis, that

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References

demonstrates the concept of publication bias. The 127 centres included in the meta-analysis represent 62 separate trials. Of these, 22 trials (54 centres) have been published, 40 trials (73 centres) have not been published.

The beneficial effect of nedocromil sodium compared with placebo is numerically greater in the published trials than in the unpublished trials for the six efficacy variables included in the meta-analysis. All variables significantly favour (p<0.05) nedocromil sodium, irrespective of published or unpublished status. However, for two of these variables (day and night asthma (Appendix 1) and patient opinion), the differences between published and unpublished trials are significantly (p<0.05) in favour of the published trials.

The inclusion of the unpublished trials in our full analysis [2], therefore, diluted the size of the effect that would be perceived by published trials alone.

We suggest that this illustrates the desirability that, at a certain stage after the introduction of a new drug, the originating company should be encouraged, or required, to publish an overview analysis of all trials in order to allow prescribing doctors to make a rational judgement of therapy.

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Appendix 1

Example. Day and night asthma: the mean difference between nedocromil sodium and placebo is 0.45 (95% CI 0.32: 0.59) for unpublished trials, and 0.67 (95% CI 0.51: 0.82) for published trials.

References