QUESTION 1
ARE ORAL ANTIBIOTICS AS EFFICACIOUS AS INTRAVENOUS ANTIBIOTICS FOR THE TREATMENT OF COMMUNITY ACQUIRED PNEUMONIA?

SCENARIO
A 7-year-old boy presents to the accident and emergency department with cough, a high temperature and signs of respiratory distress. An x-ray shows pneumonia. Does this child require intravenous antibiotics, or would oral antibiotics be sufficient?

STRUCTURED CLINICAL QUESTION
In a 7-year-old boy with pneumonia [patient], are oral antibiotics [intervention] as efficacious as intravenous antibiotics [comparison] for resolution of symptoms and avoidance of complications [outcome].

SEARCH STRATEGY
Secondary sources
A search of the Cochrane Library using the search term ‘antibiotics AND pneumonia’ revealed 20 reviews, one of which was relevant1 as it referred to two relevant trials.2 3

Primary sources
A search of MEDLINE revealed 98 articles, two of which were relevant.2 4
Of 118 papers retrieved, three were relevant (see table 1).

COMMENTARY
Pneumonia is an extremely common paediatric illness and around 40% of cases require hospitalisation.4 Those admitted are often initially treated with intravenous antibiotics which, however, carry the risk of pain of cannulation, extravasation, thrombophlebitis and local infection at the site of cannula insertion. If oral antibiotics were deemed to be equivalent in the management of community acquired pneumonia, patients would benefit from painless non-invasive treatment of this widespread disease.

Three randomised controlled trials were relevant. Two studies undertaken in developing countries2 3 both showed that there was no significant difference in treatment failure between the two groups (oral versus intravenous antibiotics). The APPIS trial2 showed no difference in clinical deterioration and no difference in side effects between the two groups. Neither study reported time to recovery or length of hospitalisation. They both used the WHO classification of pneumonia. However, the applicability of these results should be viewed with caution.
Children will benefit from receiving the treatment of pneumonia in children.

Outcomes to intravenous antibiotics in clinical intravenous antibiotic arm.

Patients who were randomised to the oral antibiotics. Complications and treatment failure were similar in both groups. In fact, empyema only occurred in three patients who were randomised to the intravenous antibiotic arm.

All three trials agree that oral antibiotics are as efficacious as intravenous antibiotics for the treatment of community acquired pneumonia. (Grade B)

Oral antibiotics should be tried in all but the sickest children with pneumonia and observed to ensure they are tolerated and symptoms are resolving. (Grade D)

Table 1 Are oral antibiotics as efficacious as intravenous antibiotics for the treatment of community acquired pneumonia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Study group</th>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Study type</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
<th>Key results</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPIS trial2</td>
<td>1702 Children in eight developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America aged 3–59 months with WHO defined severe pneumonia</td>
<td>Oral amoxicillin vs intravenous penicillin G</td>
<td>Multicentre randomised equivalency study</td>
<td>Treatment failure up to 48 h: appearance of danger signs, persistent, lower chest in-drawing, drug reaction, needs other antibiotic or death</td>
<td>Treatment failure was 19% in each group. Risk difference −0.4% (95% CI −4.2 to 3.3)</td>
<td>Injectable penicillin and oral amoxicillin are equivalent for treatment of severe pneumonia. Concealment of allocation. Intention to treat. Non-blinded.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Campbell et al2</td>
<td>134 Children from rural villages in the Gambia with WHO defined pneumonia</td>
<td>Oral co-trimoxazole vs intramuscular procaine penicillin + oral penicillin</td>
<td>Quasi-randomised equivalence study</td>
<td>Treatment failure at 1 week: persistence of lower chest in-drawing, other respiratory distress and high temperature</td>
<td>On day 7 treatment failure occurred in 9.1% of the co-trimoxazole group and 10.2% of the combined group. Risk difference −0.01% (95% CI −0.11 to 0.09)</td>
<td>No significant differences in global treatment failure between the two groups at 2-week follow-up. No concealment of allocation. Non-blinded. Intention to treat.</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIVOT trial4</td>
<td>246 Children with community acquired pneumonia admitted to eight hospitals in Nottingham, UK</td>
<td>Oral amoxicillin vs intravenous benzylpenicillin</td>
<td>Multicentre randomised controlled equivalence study</td>
<td>Time for temperature to decrease to &lt;38°C for 24 h and cessation of O2 requirement. Length of stay, complications</td>
<td>Time for temperature to decrease to &lt;38°C for 24 h and cessation of O2 requirement. Length of stay, complications</td>
<td>Oral amoxicillin is effective for most children admitted to hospital with pneumonia. Concealment of allocation. Intention to treat. Non-blinded.</td>
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</table>

Clinical bottom line

- Oral antibiotics are as efficacious as intravenous antibiotics in the treatment of community acquired pneumonia in children. (Grade B)
- Oral antibiotics should be tried in all but the sickest children with pneumonia and observed to ensure they are tolerated and symptoms are resolving. (Grade D)

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REFERENCES