

# This Week in the Journal

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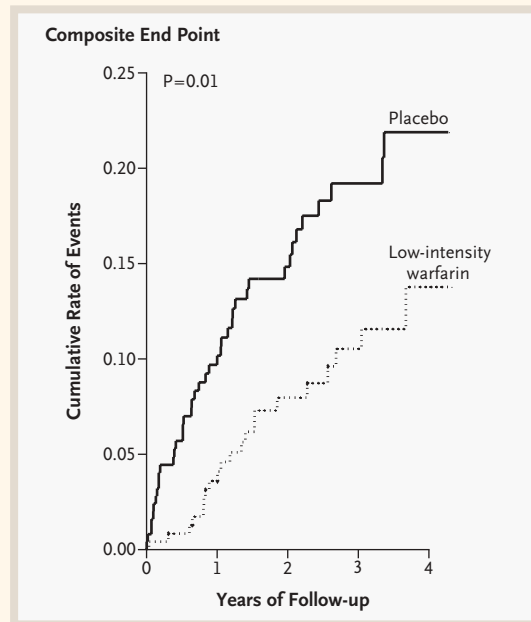
ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Low-Intensity Warfarin Therapy to Prevent Recurrent Venous Thrombosis

The standard therapy for idiopathic venous thromboembolism is anticoagulation with heparin followed by 3 to 12 months of warfarin therapy, but after warfarin is discontinued, venous thrombosis may recur. This clinical trial compared long-term, low-intensity warfarin therapy (target international normalized ratio, 1.5 to 2.0) with placebo after completion of standard anticoagulant therapy. Low-intensity warfarin therapy was very effective and was associated with a low risk of bleeding.

**This study may set a new standard for prophylactic anti-coagulant therapy after an episode of idiopathic venous thromboembolism. Long-term, low-intensity warfarin therapy may become the recommended approach.**

SEE PAGE 1425; EDITORIAL, PAGE 1478



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Atherosclerosis and Venous Thrombosis

Patients with atherosclerotic disease may have generalized activation of the coagulation system. This study used ultrasonography to quantify carotid-artery atherosclerosis in patients with deep venous thrombosis and control subjects. Patients with deep venous thrombosis had a significantly higher incidence of carotid-artery disease than controls.

**Activation of the coagulation system may serve as a pathophysiological link between atherosclerosis and venous thrombosis, raising the possibility of preventive interventions.**

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

## Polymorphisms in the Drug-Transporter Gene *ABCB1* in Patients with Drug-Resistant Epilepsy

The cause of drug-resistant epilepsy, a common and debilitating illness affecting one third of patients with epilepsy, is unknown. In this genetic study, patients with drug-resistant epilepsy were more likely to have a polymorphism in a drug-transporter gene (*ABCB1*) than patients with drug-responsive epilepsy.

**This study identifies an interesting association between a polymorphism in a gene that controls the transport of drugs used in epilepsy and resistance to epilepsy medications. This genetic discovery may lead to advances in the treatment of drug-resistant epilepsy.**

SEE PAGE 1442; EDITORIAL, PAGE 1480

## THIS WEEK IN THE JOURNAL

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

**Preimplantation Diagnosis for Sonic Hedgehog Mutation**

Mutations in the sonic hedgehog gene have been linked to holoprosencephaly. Mosaicism for the sonic hedgehog mutation was identified by single-sperm testing in a man who had fathered two affected children. Genomic DNA was normal in both parents on screening. The use of preimplantation genetic diagnosis led to the birth of a healthy girl who was confirmed to be free of the sonic hedgehog mutation.

**This report indicates that preimplantation genetic diagnosis may be a useful option in families with a history of congenital malformations.**

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## CLINICAL PRACTICE

**Care of Patients after Coronary-Artery Bypass Surgery**

A 71-year-old woman who had a myocardial infarction five years previously and underwent coronary-artery bypass surgery six months ago visits a primary care physician. She had no complications after surgery, but intraoperative transesophageal echocardiography revealed a grade V atheroma in the descending aorta. She has no cardiac or neurologic symptoms but notes that she feels depressed and has difficulty concentrating. The low-density lipoprotein cholesterol level is 128 mg per deciliter, the high-density lipoprotein cholesterol level is 40 mg per deciliter, and the triglyceride level is 200 mg per deciliter. What should the physician advise to improve her long-term outcome?

SEE PAGE 1456

## CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS OF BASIC RESEARCH

**Hemoglobin and the Paracrine and Endocrine Functions of Nitric Oxide**

Nitric oxide, a key factor in the maintenance of vascular tone, causes vascular smooth muscles to relax. Hemoglobin rapidly destroys nitric oxide, thereby limiting the activity of the gas to the local environment. Recent work suggests that nitric oxide reacts with hemoglobin at high oxygen tensions to form relatively long-lived products. At low oxygen tensions, these products release vasodilatory nitric oxide. This work is controversial, but it provides evidence of the potential of inhaled nitric oxide as a therapeutic agent.

SEE PAGE 1483

## LEGAL ISSUES IN MEDICINE

**HIPAA Regulations — A New Era of Medical-Record Privacy?**

The new privacy regulations of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) become effective April 14, 2003. This article outlines the implications of the new policy for practicing physicians. The regulations will affect virtually every physician, because they apply to any health care provider who conducts any business electronically, including billing. The regulations require health care providers to provide patients with a privacy notice that informs them who will have access to their records without their explicit consent and about patients' rights to inspect and amend their own records.

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