

The Effect The Women's Health Initiative Study (WHI) in July 2002 had on Management of Menopause: A Literature Review

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Introduction: Symptoms of menopause are a common reason women seek Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). The Women's Health Initiative (WHI) was a US multi outcome study, which included an arm examining the suggested reduction in the risk of cardiovascular disease in post-menopausal women using combined HRT. This study had over 16,000 participants and was designed to last 8.5 years, however it was ceased after 5.2 years due to an unacceptable increase in adverse outcomes, including breast cancer. The aim of this review is to determine the effect the WHI findings had on the use of combined HRT.

Methods: Literature review of available studies and publications.

Results: The initial and ongoing response to the WHI study was wide and variable. Peer reviewed journal articles were published both in support and in dispute of the findings. Many publications examined the existing data from the WHI as well as new data on the subject. The conclusions of many of these reviews did not support the findings of the WHI.



Discussion: The findings of the WHI had a broad impact on the use of HRT in the management of menopause and sparked significant debate in the safety of HRT. Ongoing research is required in the area to conclude on the long term safety of HRT, however it is generally accepted that combined HRT for 5 years or less in the immediate post-menopausal period is not associated with a significant increase in breast cancer risk. This conclusion is supported by current RANZCOG guidelines. The findings of the WHI were widely misinterpreted and incorrectly extrapolated, resulting in major changes to the way HRT was used in the management of menopause.

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