EXTENDED REPORT

Adalimumab, a human anti-TNF monoclonal antibody, outcome study for the prevention of joint damage in Japanese patients with early rheumatoid arthritis: the HOPEFUL 1 study

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Handling editor Tore K Kvien

ABSTRACT

Objectives To evaluate the efficacy and safety of adalimumab + methotrexate (MTX) in Japanese patients with early rheumatoid arthritis (RA) who had not previously received MTX or biologics.

Methods This randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, multicentre study evaluated adalimumab 40 mg every other week + MTX 6–8 mg every week versus MTX 6–8 mg every week alone for 26 weeks in patients with RA (≤2-year duration). The primary endpoint was inhibition of radiographic progression (change (Δ) from baseline in modified total Sharp score (mTSS)) at week 26.

Results A total of 171 patients received adalimumab + MTX (mean dose, 6.2±0.8 mg/week) and 163 patients received MTX alone (mean dose, 6.6±0.6 mg/week, p<0.001). The mean RA duration was 0.3 years and 315 (94.3%) had high disease activity (DAS28>5.1). Adalimumab + MTX significantly inhibited radiographic progression at week 26 versus MTX alone (ΔmTSS, 1.5±6.1 vs 2.4±3.2, respectively; p<0.001). Significantly more patients in the adalimumab + MTX group (62.0%) did not show radiographic progression (ΔmTSS<0.5) versus the MTX alone group (35.4%; p<0.001). Patients treated with adalimumab + MTX were significantly more likely to achieve American College of Rheumatology responses and achieve clinical remission, using various definitions, at 26 weeks versus MTX alone. Combination therapy was well tolerated, and no new safety signals were observed.

Conclusions Adalimumab in combination with low-dose MTX was well tolerated and efficacious in suppressing radiographic progression and improving clinical outcomes in Japanese patients with early RA and high disease activity.

INTRODUCTION

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is a chronic inflammatory disorder that is associated with joint damage and progressive disability, an increased risk of morbidity related to comorbid conditions, and substantial socioeconomic costs.1.4 Given the significant impact biologic therapies have had in the treatment of RA, a paradigm shift has emerged toward earlier inclusion of these therapies in the management of RA.3,4 Furthermore, international guidelines published in 2010 recommend a treat-to-target goal of remission for patients with early RA in order to mitigate radiographic progression and long-term disability.5 The efficacy and safety of adalimumab, a tumour necrosis factor (TNF)-α inhibitor, administered as monotherapy or in combination with methotrexate (MTX) for the treatment of RA has been well established in clinical trials conducted in Western countries.6–12 In early RA, the PREMIER and OPTIMA studies demonstrated that initial combination therapy with adalimumab and MTX was superior to MTX alone in inhibiting radiographic progression and improving clinical symptoms.6,7,12 Translating efficacy and safety results of RA Western-based studies to an Eastern populace can be potentially misleading given the genetic, medical and environmental differences (eg, body weight) observed between the two populations.13 A limited number of studies have evaluated the efficacy or effectiveness and safety of adalimumab in Japanese patients. However, these studies either assessed adalimumab monotherapy in moderate-to-severe RA14 or were retrospective;15 or postmarketing surveillance studies16 of adalimumab monotherapy or combination therapy in a population with a wide range of RA duration and prior biologic and MTX experience. Thus, a randomised, placebo-controlled study of adalimumab + MTX combination therapy in MTX-naive Japanese patients with early RA was lacking.

The current study, called adalimumab, a human anti-TNF monoclonal antibody, outcome study for the persistent efficacy under allocation to treatment strategies in early RA, or HOPEFUL 1, was conducted to compare the efficacy and safety of early intervention with adalimumab + MTX versus MTX alone for 26 weeks in inhibiting radiographic progression in MTX-naive Japanese patients with RA.

PATIENTS AND METHODS

Patients aged ≥20 years were evaluated during March 2009 and November 2010 from 94 centres. Eligible patients had RA (1987-revised American College of Rheumatology (ACR) criteria),17 of ≤2-year duration, a tender joint count ≥10, a swollen joint count ≥8, a C reactive protein (CRP) level ≥1.5 mg/dl or erythrocyte sedimentation rate...
(ESR) ≥28 mm/h, and had ≥1 joint erosion or were rheumatoid factor positive. Patients had not previously received MTX, leflu-nomide or >2 other disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARDs). Patients who had previously received cyclophos-phamide, cyclosporine, azathioprine, tacrolimus or biologic DMARDs (eg, anti-TNF-α therapy) and patients with a chronic infection, interstitial pneumonia, or a history of tuberculosis or malignancy were excluded from the study.

The phase III trial consisted of a randomised, double-blind, placebo-controlled, 26-week phase followed by a 26-week open-label extension phase (clinicaltrials.gov identifier, NCT00870467; only 26-week double-blind data presented). After a 4-week washout period for patients taking eligible DMARDs and a >2-week screening period for all patients, participants were randomised (1:1) to receive subcutaneous adalimumab 40 mg or placebo every other week, both administered in combination with oral MTX 6–8 mg/week (adalimumab +MTX vs MTX alone) for 26 weeks. Treatment with MTX was initiated at 6 mg/week and increased to 8 mg/week in patients who did not experience ≥20% decrease from baseline in tender or swollen joint counts on or after week 8, unless investigators indicated a safety concern. In addition, reduction of the MTX dose to 4 mg/week was permitted at the investigator’s discretion. All patients received concomitant oral folic acid 5 mg/week. Patients who experienced a >20% increase from baseline in tender and swollen joint counts at weeks 12, 16 or 20 were to discontinue blinded treatment with adalimumab or placebo and were eligible for open-label rescue treatment with adalimumab 40 mg every other week.

The primary endpoint was inhibition of radiographic progression assessed as the change from baseline (Δ) in modified total Sharp score (mTSS) at week 26. All single-emulsion radiographs of the hands (posteroanterior view) and feet (anteroposterior view) obtained from a patient were scored by two independent readers blinded to patient and treatment, as previously described, with the exception that the triquetrum/pisiform joint was not scored for erosions and the first interphalangeal joint was not scored for joint-space narrowing (range, 0–380) (see online supplementary text for more information).

Secondary efficacy endpoints included ACR responses by visit; clinical remission (the 28-joint disease activity score with ESR (DAS28-ESR)<2.6) at week 26; and change from baseline in the Health Assessment Questionnaire disability index (HAQ-DI) at week 26. Several additional post hoc analyses were conducted, including assessments of the DAS28-CRP simplified disease activity index (SDAI) and clinical disease activity index (CDAI) scores over time; clinically relevant radiographic progression (ΔmTSS>3); European League Against Rheumatism responses at week 26; and clinical remission, defined as DAS28-CRP<2.6, SDAI≤3.3, CDAI≤2.8 or meeting Boolean remission criteria, at week 26. Low, medium and high disease activity was also determined using DAS28-ESR, DAS28-CRP, SDAI and CDAI.

Statistics
The primary endpoint was analysed using the Wilcoxon rank sum test for observed data with a separate supportive analysis using linear extrapolation (LE) to impute missing values. Secondary endpoints were analysed using the Fisher’s exact test and Wilcoxon rank sum test for discrete variables and continuous variables, respectively. Non-responder imputation was used for binary variables, and the last-observation-carried-forward approach was applied for continuous variables. The safety population included all randomised patients who received ≥1 dose of study medication and had ≥1 efficacy assessment.

To identify baseline predictors of no radiographic progression (mTSS≤0.5) and clinical remission (DAS28-ESR<2.6),
univariate logistic regression analysis was performed, applying 24 baseline demographics and disease characteristics. Significant (p<0.01) variables in univariate were included in multivariate models. Last, multivariate models were selected based on model fit statistics (Akaike information criterion and r²) and clinical significance. Adjusted OR and 95% CIs for selected baseline variables were calculated.

RESULTS

Overall, 334 patients were randomised to treatment and received adalimumab+MTX (n=171) or MTX alone (n=163), and 148 (86.5%) and 128 (78.5%) patients completed the double-blind portion of the study, respectively (figure 1). Demographics and baseline characteristics were well matched between treatment groups (table 1). The mean RA disease duration was 0.3 years, and the majority of patients had 0.1 erosion at baseline and high disease activity. The mean MTX dose during the 26-week study was 6.2±0.8 mg/week in the adalimumab+MTX group and 6.6±0.6 mg/week in the MTX alone group (p<0.001). After 26 weeks of treatment, 34.5% (59/171) of adalimumab+MTX patients were receiving MTX 8 mg/week versus 65.0% (106/163) of MTX alone patients (p<0.001).

Radiographic progression

Treatment with adalimumab+MTX significantly inhibited radiographic progression (figure 2A) at week 26 versus MTX alone (mean change±SD, 1.5±6.1 vs 2.4±3.2, respectively; p<0.001). Results were confirmed by an LE analysis (figure 2A). Changes in radiographic progression during 26 weeks of treatment were also assessed by a cumulative probability plot of ΔmTSS (figure 2B). Fewer adalimumab+MTX patients exhibited radiographic progression (ΔmTSS>0.5), with 62.0% (57/91) of patients showing no radiographic progression versus 35.4% (57/161) of MTX alone patients (p<0.001). Furthermore, only 14.0% (24/171) of adalimumab+MTX patients exhibited clinically relevant radiographic progression (ΔmTSS>3) versus 37.3% (60/161) of MTX alone patients (p<0.001). In addition, a significantly higher percentage of adalimumab+MTX patients did not experience worsening (≤0.5) in erosion score (73.7% (126/171)) versus MTX alone patients (42.2% (68/161); p<0.001). In patients who lacked baseline erosive damage, the continued absence of erosions was reported in more adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients (9/9 vs 2/6 patients, respectively; p=0.01).

Clinical response

A significantly higher percentage of adalimumab+MTX patients achieved ACR responses versus MTX alone patients at each assessment (figure 3A–C). Significant differences between treatment groups, observed as early as week 2, were maintained through week 26. At week 26, a significantly larger percentage of adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients achieved ACR20, ACR50 and ACR70 (figure 3A–C) and ACR90 (12.9% vs 5.5%; p=0.02) responses. Significant differences in favour of adalimumab+MTX were also observed from week 2 to 26 for DAS28-ESR, DAS28-CRP, SDAI and CDAI (see online supplementary figure 1A–D). A larger percentage of adalimumab+MTX patients than MTX alone patients demonstrated good or moderate European League Against Rheumatism responses (figure 3D) and were in states of low disease activity or remission after 26 weeks of treatment (figure 3E). Furthermore, a significantly larger percentage of adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients satisfied Boolean remission criteria (19.3% vs 8.6%, p=0.007). Adalimumab+MTX achieved a 1.8- to 2.2-fold increase in the percentage of patients achieving clinical remission, across all definitions of clinical remission evaluated, versus MTX alone.

A significantly larger decrease from baseline in mean HAQ-DI score, indicative of an improvement in physical function, was observed for adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients at week 26 (−0.6±0.6 vs −0.4±0.6; p<0.001). Although the significant difference between the two groups was small (0.2 units), the percentage of patients achieving normal functionality (HAQ-DI score<0.5) after 26 weeks of treatment was also significantly higher with adalimumab+MTX (figure 3F).

Factors associated with the absence of radiographic progression or with clinical remission

Disease activity or function baseline variables generally were associated with the absence of radiographic progression (ΔmTSS≤0.5) and with clinical remission (DAS28-ESR<2.6) in both treatment groups (see online supplementary text and online supplementary table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter*</th>
<th>Adalimumab+MTX (n=171)</th>
<th>MTX (n=163)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age±SD (year)</td>
<td>54.0±13.1</td>
<td>54.0±13.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Females (%</td>
<td>144 (84.2)</td>
<td>128 (78.5)</td>
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<td>RA duration±SD (year)</td>
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<td>0.3±0.4</td>
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<td>Weight±SD (kg)</td>
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<td>56.1±12.3</td>
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<td>Previous DMARD use (%</td>
<td>74 (43.3)</td>
<td>87 (53.4)</td>
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<td>1 DMARD</td>
<td>57 (33.3)</td>
<td>69 (42.3)</td>
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<td>2 DMARDs</td>
<td>17 (9.9)</td>
<td>18 (11.0)</td>
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<td>Corticosteroid use at baseline (%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mean titre±SD (IU/ml)</td>
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<td>Anti-CCP positive (%)</td>
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<td>Mean titre±SD (U/ml)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tender joint count (n±SD)</td>
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<tr>
<td>0–68</td>
<td>20.7±9.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>mTSS</td>
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<tr>
<td>Erosion score</td>
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<td>Joint space narrowing score</td>
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<td>DAS28-ESR</td>
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<td>DAS28-CRP</td>
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<td>HAQ-DI score</td>
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<td>SDAI score</td>
<td>40.7±12.0</td>
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<td>CDAI score</td>
<td>37.8±10.9</td>
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<td>Physician’s global assessment of disease activity±SD (mm)</td>
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<td>Patient’s global assessment of disease activity±SD (mm)</td>
<td>64.1±24.8</td>
<td>64.4±23.7</td>
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</table>

*Data are mean±SD unless otherwise indicated.

CCP, cyclic citrullinated peptide; CDAI, clinical disease activity index; CRP, C reactive protein; DAS28-CRP, disease activity score using a 28-joint count and CRP level; DAS28-ESR, disease activity score using a 28-joint count and ESR; DMARD, disease-modifying antirheumatic drug; ESR, erythrocyte sedimentation rate; HAQ-DI, Health Assessment Questionnaire disability index; mTSS, modified total Sharp score; MTX, methotrexate; RA, rheumatoid arthritis; RF, rheumatoid factor; SDAI, simplified disease activity index.
The mean treatment duration during the double-blind phase was 168.7±36.6 days for adalimumab+MTX patients (mean cumulative adalimumab dose, 477.4±104.5 mg) and 162.8±38.6 days for MTX alone patients. Overall, there were 376 and 302 AEs reported in the adalimumab+MTX group and the MTX alone group, respectively. There were no significant differences in the percentage of patients with AEs in the adalimumab+MTX group (80.7% (138/171)) versus the MTX alone group (71.8% (117/163)), and the incidence of severe AEs was rare (table 2). No clinically relevant radiographic progression (change from baseline mTSS≤0.5) was reported in 62.0% (106/171) of adalimumab+MTX patients versus 62.7% (101/161) of MTX alone patients (p<0.001). No clinically relevant radiographic progression (change from baseline mTSS≤3) was reported in 86.0% (147/171) of adalimumab+MTX patients versus 62.7% (101/161) of MTX alone patients (p<0.001) (B). LE, linear extrapolation; mTSS, modified total Sharp score; MTX, methotrexate. p Value determined using Wilcoxon rank sum test.

**DISCUSSION**

The HOPEFUL 1 study was designed to evaluate the efficacy and safety of adalimumab in combination with MTX in Japanese patients with early RA. This is the first description of a clinical trial of anti-TNF therapy+MTX alone in MTX-naive Japanese patients with early RA and high disease activity. It is also the first randomised trial evaluating the efficacy of anti-TNF therapy+low-dose MTX versus low-dose MTX alone for the inhibition of radiographic progression in any patient population. This study extends observations from Western studies of adalimumab by demonstrating the superiority of adalimumab+MTX to MTX alone for the inhibition of radiographic progression and improvement in clinical outcomes in Japanese patients with early RA. Moreover, the combination of adalimumab+MTX significantly improved a wide array of clinical and functional disease activity measures and responses versus MTX alone, with improvements observed as early as the first assessment (week 2) and maintained through the 26-week double-blind trial.

Following 26 weeks of treatment, the mean ΔmTSS (primary endpoint) in adalimumab+MTX patients (1.48) in the current study was significantly smaller than observed in MTX alone patients (2.38). In addition, a similar trend in inhibition of radiographic progression in patients with early RA was observed in the OPTIMA study, with a smaller mean ΔmTSS in adalimumab+MTX patients (0.15) versus MTX alone patients (0.96; p<0.001). The difference between the two treatment groups (0.8) at week 26 was similar to the difference observed in the current study (0.9 (observed)). Furthermore, baseline characteristics, including RA duration, in the two studies were generally similar, but the OPTIMA study had a lower percentage of previous DMARD use.

A similar trend in inhibition of radiographic progression in the current study was observed in the PREMIER study, with a
smaller mean ΔmTSS in adalimumab+MTX patients (0.8) versus MTX alone patients (3.5; p<0.001). However, the mean difference in radiographic progression between the two treatments groups, although statistically significant, was smaller in the current study (0.9 (observed); 2.0 (LE)) than in the PREMIER study (2.7).

In the current study, the SD for the mean ΔmTSS at week 26 was generally high. When the median ΔmTSS was compared using observed data, results were in good agreement between the PREMIER study (0.0 (adalimumab+MTX) vs 1.3 (MTX alone); data on file) and the current study (0.0 (adalimumab+MTX) vs 1.0 (MTX alone)). Alternatively, the smaller difference in improvement observed in the current study may also be related to the mTSS scoring method used, but this seems unlikely because only two joints assessed in PREMIER were omitted from scoring in the present analysis. The mean duration of RA was also shorter in the current study (0.3 years) versus the PREMIER study (0.7–0.8 years), although the percentage of patients who had previously taken DMARDs was higher (43.3–53.4% vs 31.5–32.5%). There were also slight differences in mean baseline tender and swollen joint counts and CRP levels, which were higher in the PREMIER study and considered
related to the longer duration of RA at baseline versus the current study. Furthermore, the MTX dose of 6–8 mg/week, although consistent with the dosage commonly administered in Japan at the time the study was conducted, was substantially lower than that commonly administered in Western countries (eg, 15–20 mg/week). In the PREMIER study, MTX was initiated at 7.5 mg/week, increased to 15 mg/week during weeks 4–8, and increased to 20 mg/week starting at week 9. In addition, the mean MTX dose during the 26 weeks of the current study was significantly lower in the adalimumab+MTX group (6.2±0.8 mg/week) versus the MTX alone group (6.6±0.6 mg/week; p<0.001), thereby potentially impacting the difference in radiographic outcomes for adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients. There was a significantly higher incidence of injection-site reactions for adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients. There was a significantly higher incidence of injection-site reactions for adalimumab+MTX patients versus MTX alone patients, but the incidence (10.5%) was similar to that reported for the 167 adalimumab+MTX patients in the HARMONY study (12.0%). The incidence of injection-site reactions in both of these studies was lower than the 30.8% reported for the 91 adalimumab monotherapy patients (40 mg every other week) in the CHANGE study, possibly related to the immunosuppressive effects of concomitant MTX in the current study and in some of the patients in the HARMONY study.

In the multivariate regression analyses (see online supplementary table 1), lower baseline CRP level was identified as a predictor of radiographic non-progression in adalimumab+MTX patients, whereas normal baseline CRP level (≤0.3 mg/dl) appeared to have an increased likelihood of radiographic non-progression. However, no baseline predictors appeared to predict both the lack of progression and clinical remission. Furthermore, baseline mTSS was not an independent predictor for either treatment group in this study.

Overall, adalimumab+MTX was well tolerated in Japanese patients with early RA with no new safety signals and with a safety and tolerability profile similar to that observed in Western populations. Administration of adalimumab in combination with MTX was efficacious in improving radiographic and clinical responses in MTX-naive patients with early RA, high disease activity and poor prognostic factors (eg, rheumatoid factor positive or with baseline erosive damage) through week 26. Given its radiographic, clinical and functional superiority versus MTX monotherapy, consideration should be given to administration

### Table 2 Adverse events (AEs)

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Parameter</th>
<th>Adalimumab+MTX (n=171)</th>
<th>MTX (n=163)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Any AE</td>
<td>138 (80.7)</td>
<td>117 (71.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe AE</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious AE</td>
<td>7 (4.1)</td>
<td>4 (2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infectious AE</td>
<td>59 (34.5)</td>
<td>48 (29.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious infection</td>
<td>2 (1.2)</td>
<td>1 (0.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEs leading to study drug discontinuation</td>
<td>7 (4.1)</td>
<td>6 (3.7)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*p=0.02 versus MTX.
†≥94% of events were mild in severity.
MTX, methotrexate.

of anti-TNF-α and MTX combination therapy in patients with early RA and high disease activity.

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Patient consent Obtained.

Ethics approval An institutional review board approved the study at each site.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

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