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CLINICAL RESEARCH

Impact of a public media event on the use of statins in the French population

Impact d'un événement médiatique public sur l'utilisation des statines dans la population française

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Summary

Background. — In February 2013, a retired French professor of medicine published a book denying the benefits of statins for cardiovascular prevention. The book was the subject of extensive media coverage and multiple public discussions and debate.

Aims. — To investigate the impact of this media event on use of statins among regular users.

Methods. — This repeated cohort study used the French claims database sample *Echantillon généraliste des bénéficiaires* to identify regular statin users and quantify the number who discontinued statins after February 2013, compared to discontinuation patterns in previous years (2011 and 2012). Discontinuation was defined as a gap of at least 2 months without statin exposure.

Abbreviations: EGB, Échantillon généraliste des bénéficiaires; LTD, long-term disease groups; ICD-10, International Classification of Diseases 10th revision; ATC, anatomical therapeutic chemical; PDC, proportion of days covered; IQR, interquartile range.

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Results. – In 2013, 30,725 regular statin users were identified; 29,517 in 2012 and 28,272 in 2011. Statin discontinuation at 9-month follow-up in 2013 was 11.9% (95% confidence interval [CI] 11.5–12.2), compared with 8.5% (95% CI 8.2–8.8) in 2012 and 8.5% (95% CI 8.2–8.8) in 2011. Discontinuation varied according to cardiovascular risk: 19.4% (95% CI 18.2–20.6) in low risk, 11.6% (95% CI 11.1–12.0) in moderate risk, and 7.4% (95% CI 6.8–8.1) in high risk for the 2013 cohort. These discontinuation rates were, respectively, 1.53 (95% CI 1.36–1.72), 1.40 (95% CI 1.31–1.49), and 1.25 (95% CI 1.08–1.46) times higher in 2013 than in 2012 for low risk, moderate risk, or high risk patients.

Conclusions. – The rate of statin discontinuation, overall and in each cardiovascular risk group, was greater in 2013 after the media event than in previous years. The clinical impact of the increased discontinuation could be important.

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MOTS CLÉS

Statines ;
Pharmaco-
épidémiologie ;
Assurance, santé,
remboursement ;
Adhérence au
traitement ;
Médias

Résumé

Contexte. – En février 2013, un médecin français publie un livre polémique et de grande ampleur médiatique réfutant le bénéfice des statines en prévention cardiovasculaire.

Objectif. – Estimer l'impact de cet événement médiatique sur l'utilisation des statines.

Méthodes. – Étude de cohorte répétée à partir de l'échantillon représentatif de l'Assurance maladie française comparant l'incidence de l'arrêt des statines chez les utilisateurs réguliers après février 2013 à celle des années précédentes (2011 et 2012). L'arrêt des statines a été défini comme une absence de délivrance d'au moins deux mois après une période d'exposition aux statines.

Résultats. – En 2013, 30 725 utilisateurs réguliers de statines ont été identifiés (29 517 en 2012 et 28 272 en 2011). L'incidence de l'arrêt des statines à 9 mois de suivi en 2013 était de 11,9 % (intervalle de confiance à 95 %, 11,5–12,2), de 8,5 % (8,2–8,8) en 2012 et de 8,5 % en 2011 (8,2–8,8). Cette incidence variait en fonction du risque cardiovasculaire : 19,4 % (18,2–20,6) chez les patients à faible risque, 11,6 % (11,1–12,0) chez ceux à risque modéré et 7,4 % (6,8–8,1) chez ceux à haut risque en 2013. Ces taux d'incidence était respectivement 1,53 (1,36–1,72), 1,40 (1,31–1,49) et 1,25 (1,08–1,46) fois plus élevée en 2013 qu'en 2012 pour les patients à faible risque, à risque modéré ou à risque élevé.

Conclusion. – Le taux d'incidence de l'arrêt des statines, globalement et dans chaque groupe de risque cardiovasculaire, était plus élevé en 2013 après l'événement médiatique que dans les années précédentes.

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Background

Hydroxymethylglutaryl-coA reductase inhibitors, or statins, have demonstrated efficacy in secondary prevention of coronary heart disease [1–3], yet their efficacy in primary prevention may be more controversial [4–7]. In February 2013, a retired French professor of medicine published a book entitled “*La vérité sur le cholestérol*” (The truth about cholesterol) arguing that cholesterol is not linked to cardiovascular diseases and refuting the validity of all studies concluding to an efficacy of statins for cardiovascular prevention [8]. Interviews with the author for the promotion of the book were widely broadcast in a variety of media [9,10]. Health authorities and scientists from the medical community protested against his theory, considered dangerous for public health [11]. An interview-based investigation showed that approximately one-quarter of statin users interviewed in March 2013 during consultations with a

cardiologist intended to discontinue statin treatment [12]. As only a small number of patients were included and were interviewed only on their intention to discontinue treatment, the objective of the present study was to investigate the real impact of this extensive media outpouring on discontinuation in formerly regular users of statins. To this intent, we used the national healthcare system claims database sample to identify regular statin users and quantify the number who discontinued statins after February 2013, compared with discontinuation patterns in previous years.

Methods

Study design

This repeated cohort study used data from the French health insurance database sample (*Échantillon généraliste*

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