

Rifaximin Monotherapy Has Significantly Reduced the Risk of Overt Hepatic Encephalopathy Recurrence Versus Lactulose Monotherapy in Patients With Cirrhosis and a History of Previous Episode(s): A Post Hoc Analysis of Randomized Trials

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INTRODUCTION

- Rifaximin (Tixteller[®]/Xifaxan[®]) is indicated in multiple countries for the reduction in risk of overt hepatic encephalopathy (OHE) recurrence in adults
- Lactulose monotherapy (titrated to achieve 2-3 bowel movements daily) is recommended as secondary prophylaxis after an initial episode of OHE^{1,2}
 - Rifaximin is recommended as add-on therapy when additional episodes occur^{1,2}
- Nonadherence to lactulose therapy can precipitate hepatic encephalopathy (HE) recurrence^{3,4}
 - In a 2023 study (N=129), HE-related hospital admission rates were numerically greater in patients nonadherent (Morisky Adherence Scale 8 score ≥ 2) to lactulose versus those who were adherent (41.7% vs 24.4%; $P=0.07$)⁵
 - Potential barriers to lactulose adherence include gastrointestinal (GI) adverse effects (eg, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting), dosing and volume requirements, and unpleasant taste^{5,6}
 - GI-related adverse effects, such as diarrhea, can lead to dehydration or electrolyte imbalances, which are also precipitating factors of OHE^{5,7}
- These lactulose-related issues indicate that alternative management strategies to reduce the risk of OHE recurrence may be required

AIM

- To compare the efficacy and safety of rifaximin monotherapy versus lactulose monotherapy for reducing the risk of OHE recurrence in patients with cirrhosis and a history of OHE

METHODS

- Data were pooled post hoc from 2 randomized trials (one phase 3 double-blind trial⁸ and one phase 4 open-label trial) of adults who had cirrhosis and a history of OHE occurrence during the previous 6 months and were currently in OHE remission (Conn score ≤ 1)

Treatment and Assessments

- Data were analyzed for patients who received rifaximin 550 mg twice daily (BID) (ie, no concomitant lactulose [phase 3 or 4 trials]) or lactulose (titrated to 2-3 soft stools/d) plus placebo (ie, lactulose monotherapy [phase 3 trial]) for up to 6 months*
 - In the phase 3 trial, assessments occurred on Day 0 (± 1); Days (± 2) 7, 14, 28, 42, 56, 70, 84, 98, 112, 126, 140, 154, and 168; and during the follow-up visit (14 \pm 2 days after the end of treatment)
 - In the phase 4 trial, assessments occurred on Day 1; Days (± 2) 28, 56, 84, 112, 140, and 168; and during the follow-up visit (14 \pm 2 days after the end of treatment)
- The primary efficacy endpoint was time to first breakthrough OHE episode (Conn score ≥ 2) and a secondary endpoint was time to first HE-related hospitalization (original endpoints in both trials)
- Hazard ratio (HR) estimates were obtained using a Cox proportional hazards model with effect for treatment, and P values were based on the score statistic

*In the phase 3 trial, rifaximin 550 mg BID or placebo was administered with optional lactulose; in the phase 4 trial, rifaximin 550 mg BID or rifaximin 550 mg BID plus lactulose was administered. Only patients receiving rifaximin alone or lactulose + placebo ("lactulose alone") were included in the current analysis.

- A total of 270 patients were treated with rifaximin monotherapy (n=125) or lactulose monotherapy (n=145; **Table 1**)

Table 1. Demographic and Baseline Disease Characteristics

Characteristic	Rifaximin Monotherapy (n=125)	Lactulose Monotherapy (n=145)
Age, y, mean (SD)	58.2 (9.5)	56.6 (9.3)
Male, n (%)	75 (60.0)	99 (68.3)
Race, n (%)		
White	113 (90.4)	126 (86.9)
Black	8 (6.4)	5 (3.4)
Asian	2 (1.6)	7 (4.8)
Other	2 (1.6)	7 (4.8)
Baseline MELD score		
Mean (SD)	12 (4)	13 (4)
Median (range)	12 (6-24)	12 (6-23)
Child-Pugh class, n (%)		
A	54 (43.2)	49 (33.8)
B	64 (51.2)	67 (46.2)
C	7 (5.6)	13 (9.0)
Missing data	0	16 (11.0)
Baseline Conn score, n (%)		
0	86 (68.8)	98 (67.6)
1	39 (31.2)	47 (32.4)
Duration of current OHE remission, d, mean (SD)	89.7 (56.0)	73.6 (52.0)

MELD = Model for End-Stage Liver Disease; OHE = overt hepatic encephalopathy.

- Significantly fewer patients treated with rifaximin monotherapy experienced an OHE episode compared with lactulose monotherapy (23.2% vs 49.0%, respectively; $P<0.0001$) [**Figure 1**]
- Rifaximin monotherapy reduced the risk of a breakthrough OHE event by 60% versus lactulose monotherapy during 6 months of treatment, with a number needed to treat of 4 (HR, 0.40 [**Figure 2**])

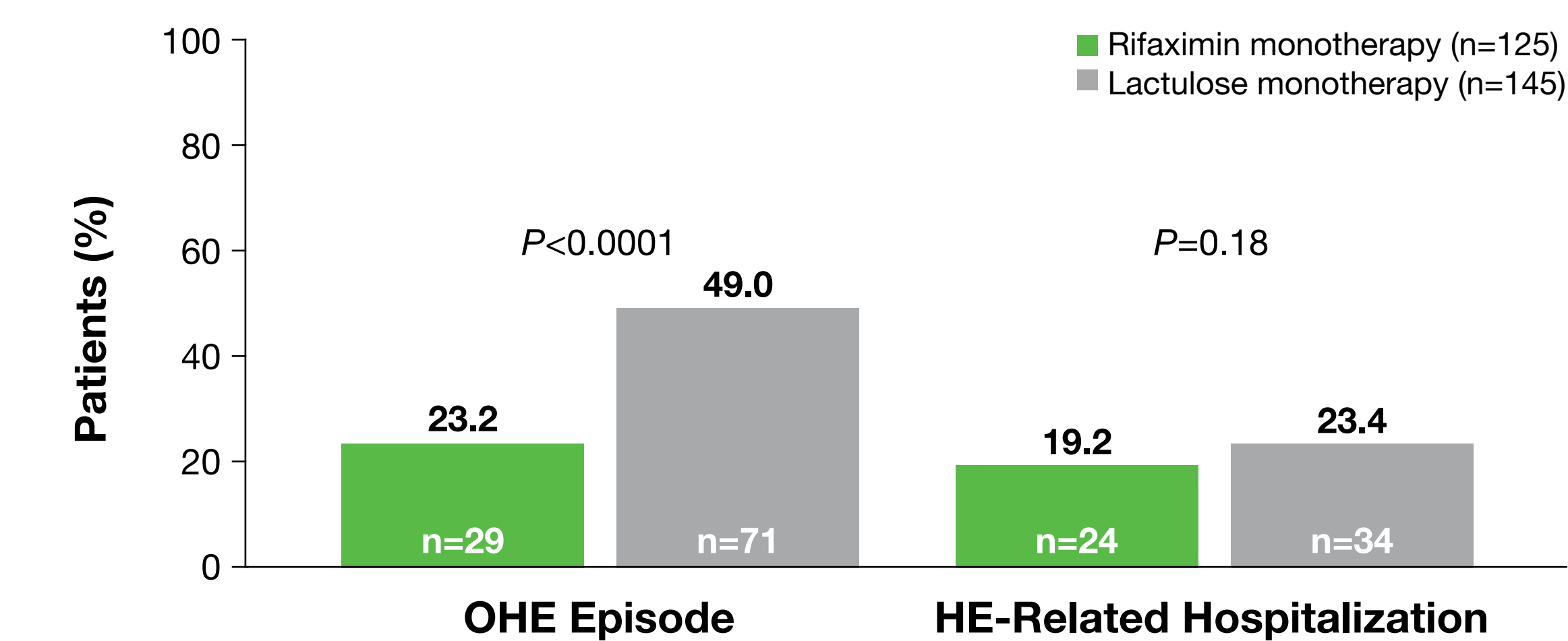
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: The trials and current analyses were supported by Salix Pharmaceuticals. Technical editorial and medical writing assistance was provided under direction of the authors by Mary Beth Moncrief, PhD, Synchrony Medical Communications, LLC, West Chester, PA. Funding for this assistance was provided by Salix Pharmaceuticals.

DISCLOSURES: JSB and RSR report being a clinical trial investigator for Salix Pharmaceuticals. CA, ZH, and RJJ are employees of Salix Pharmaceuticals or its affiliates. KVK reports having received grant/research/clinical trial support (paid to institution) from 89bio, Corcept Therapeutics, CymaBay Therapeutics, GENFIT, Gilead, GSK, Hanmi Pharmaceutical, Intercept Pharmaceuticals, Madrigal Pharmaceuticals, Mirum, Novo Nordisk, NGM Bio, Pfizer, Pliant Therapeutics, Terns Pharmaceuticals, and Viking Therapeutics; having served as a consultant/advisory board member for 89bio, CymaBay Therapeutics, Enanta Pharmaceuticals, GENFIT, Gilead, HighTide Therapeutics, Inpharm, Intercept Pharmaceuticals, Madrigal Pharmaceuticals, Mirum, NGM Bio, Pfizer, and Salix Pharmaceuticals; having served on speakers' bureaus for AbbVie, Gilead, and Intercept Pharmaceuticals; and having stock options in Inpharm.

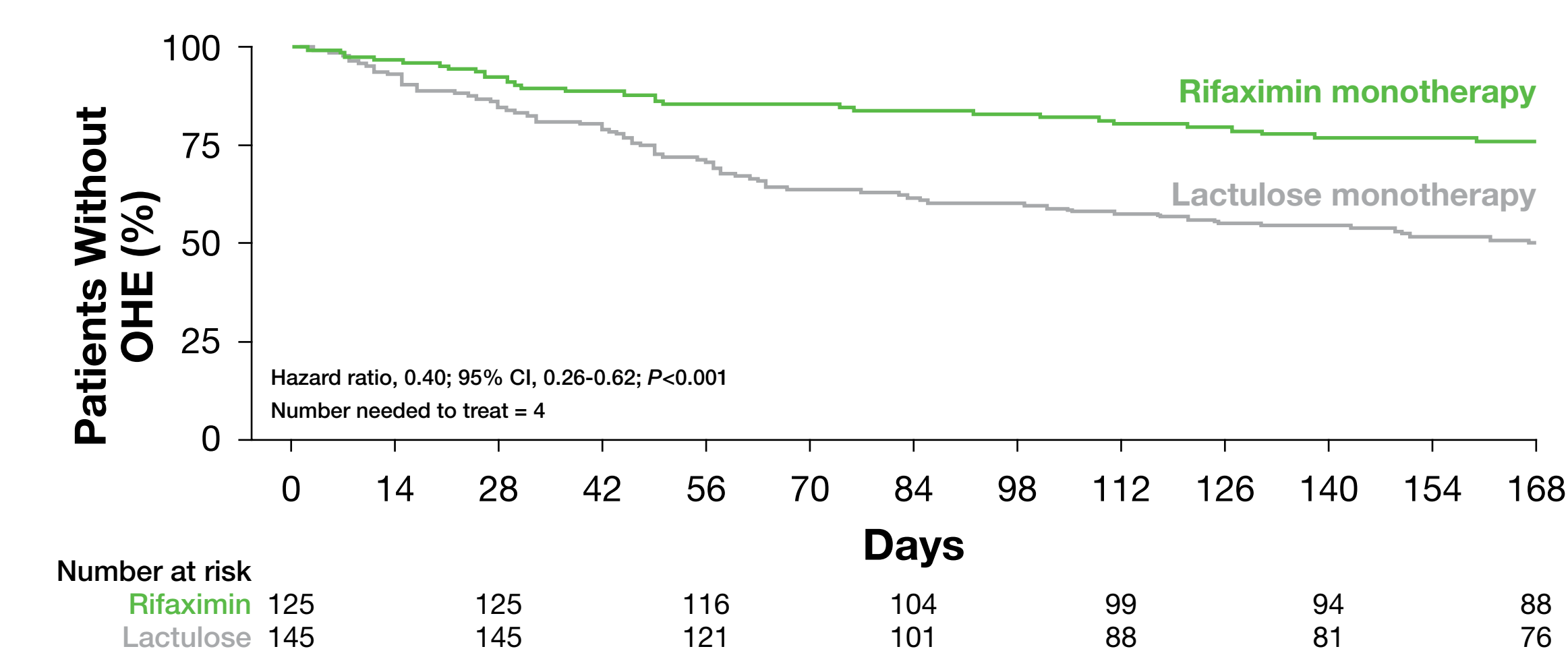
RESULTS

Figure 1. Percentage of Patients Experiencing an OHE Episode or an HE-Related Hospitalization



HE = hepatic encephalopathy; OHE = overt hepatic encephalopathy.

Figure 2. Time to First Breakthrough OHE Episode



OHE = overt hepatic encephalopathy.

- Fewer patients treated with rifaximin monotherapy had an HE-related hospitalization compared with lactulose monotherapy, although the difference was not statistically significant (19.2% vs 23.4%, respectively, $P=0.18$) [**Figure 1**]
- The most commonly reported adverse events overall (excluding HE) were nausea, fatigue, and peripheral edema (**Table 2**)
 - A higher percentage of patients treated with lactulose monotherapy compared with rifaximin monotherapy reported diarrhea (14.5% vs 4.8%) and vomiting (9.7% vs 4.8%)
- Discontinuation from study participation was higher in the lactulose monotherapy group (62.1%) versus the rifaximin monotherapy group (36.0%), most commonly due to OHE occurrence

Table 2. Summary of Adverse Events

Patients With an AE, n (%)	Rifaximin Monotherapy (n=125)	Lactulose Monotherapy (n=145)
≥ 1 AE	105 (84.0)	126 (86.9)
≥ 1 drug-related AE	8 (6.4)	35 (24.1)
≥ 1 serious AE	44 (35.2)	60 (41.4)
Deaths	2 (1.6)	10 (6.9)
Most common AEs*		
Nausea	17 (13.6)	21 (14.5)
Fatigue	16 (12.8)	18 (12.4)
Peripheral edema	20 (16.0)	13 (9.0)
Constipation	18 (14.4)	10 (6.9)
Diarrhea	6 (4.8)	21 (14.5)
Headache	9 (7.2)	17 (11.7)
Insomnia	14 (11.2)	11 (7.6)
Ascites	9 (7.2)	15 (10.3)
Muscle spasms	10 (8.0)	10 (6.9)
Vomiting	6 (4.8)	14 (9.7)
Abdominal pain	8 (6.4)	11 (7.6)
Asthenia	6 (4.8)	12 (8.3)
Anemia	12 (9.6)	6 (4.1)
Urinary tract infection	14 (11.2)	14 (9.7)

*Ranked by the highest incidence in the overall population ($\geq 6.7\%$), then alphabetically (excluding hepatic encephalopathy). AE = adverse event.

CONCLUSIONS

- Rifaximin monotherapy was well tolerated and associated with significantly fewer episodes of OHE recurrence than lactulose monotherapy in patients with cirrhosis and a history of OHE
- Data suggest rifaximin monotherapy could be a viable management option for OHE recurrence risk reduction in appropriate patients