OBJECTIVE

Compare antidepressant efficacy of venlafaxine, selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), and placebo using pooled data from >7000 patients.

METHODS

Original data from a complete set of 33 randomized, double-blind studies from a worldwide search of studies sponsored by Wyeth Pharmaceuticals were pooled to compare outcomes of depressed patients treated with venlafaxine (N=3410), SSRIs (N=3355; 1704 fluoxetine, 692 paroxetine, 652 sertraline, 273 citalopram, 34 fluvoxamine), or placebo (N=932) for less than or equal to 8 weeks. Remission (HAM-D17 score less than or equal to 7) rates and odds ratios (OR) for remission were calculated for venlafaxine versus SSRIs using pooled data from 32/33 studies (1 study did not use the HAM-D scale).

RESULTS

Overall remission rates were venlafaxine, 41% (1375/3337); SSRIs, 35% (1134/3280); and placebo, 24% (223/932). All comparisons were statistically significant for remission and for 9/9 alternate measures of antidepressant efficacy (P<0.001). The overall OR for remission vs SSRIs was 1.307 (95% CI 1.180-1.448), favoring venlafaxine. Individual ORs were 1.401 (95% CI 1.212-1.619) vs fluoxetine; 1.216 (95% CI 0.982-1.506) vs paroxetine; and 1.223 (95% CI 1.005-1.489) vs the other SSRIs. A total of 11.7% of venlafaxine-treated patients discontinued therapy due to adverse events compared to 9.0% on SSRIs and 4.3% on placebo (P<0.001 for all comparisons).

CONCLUSION

These results confirm prior research suggesting the significantly greater likelihood of achieving remission of depression with venlafaxine versus fluoxetine and other SSRIs.