Virologic Outcomes of Switching to Dolutegravir Functional Monotherapy, or Functional Dual Therapy With Dolutegravir Plus A Non-cytosine Nucleoside Analog: A Retrospective Study of Treatment-Experienced, HIV-1 Infected Patients

Charlotte-Paige Rolle (crolle@oicorlando.com)  
Emory University Rollins School of Public Health  
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6444-2225

Vu Nguyen  
University of Central Florida College of Medicine

Federico Hinestrosa  
University of Central Florida College of Medicine

Edwin DeJesus  
University of Central Florida College of Medicine

Research

Keywords: dolutegravir, HIV drug resistance, monotherapy, dual therapy

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-74793/v1

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Abstract

Background Dolutegravir (DTG) monotherapy results in unacceptable virologic failure rates and the development of DTG resistance. Here, we evaluated virologic outcomes of patients switched to DTG functional monotherapy, or functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine nucleoside analog (NA).

Methods This observational study included treatment-experienced patients switched to regimens containing ≥ 3 antiretrovirals later found to be on DTG functional monotherapy, or functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine NA based on historical genotypes. Eligible patients were either suppressed or viremic at baseline and had ≥2 HIV-1 RNA measurements at least four weeks apart following switch. The primary endpoint was the proportion with HIV-1 RNA<50 copies/mL following switch.

Results Thirty-nine patients were included, 19 (49%) were found to be on DTG functional monotherapy and 20 (51%) were found to be on functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine NA. The median duration of follow-up was 50 weeks (range 12-244). Following switch, 32/39 (82%) patients achieved or maintained an HIV-1 RNA<50 copies/mL. In 7 (18%) patients with persistent HIV-1 RNA ≥50 copies/mL, there was no evidence of treatment-emergent resistance among those with post-switch genotypes.

Conclusions In this real-world cohort, the majority of whom had virus with the M184V/I and ≥1 additional NA mutation, switching to DTG functional monotherapy, or functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine NA resulted in persistent HIV-1 RNA ≥50 copies/mL in 18%. None with post-switch genotypes developed treatment-emergent resistance.

Introduction

Phase 3 clinical trials have demonstrated the efficacy of 2-drug dolutegravir (DTG) containing regimens (DCRs) in treatment-naive and-experienced adults. In the GEMINI studies, 86% of treatment-naive adults receiving DTG + lamivudine (3TC) achieved virologic suppression through Week 96 [1]. In treatment-experienced, virologically suppressed adults, 84% switched to DTG + rilpivirine (RPV) maintained virologic suppression through Week 148 [2], and 93% switched to DTG + 3TC maintained suppression through Week 48 [3].

Switch studies of DTG + RPV demonstrated that 6/11 patients experiencing confirmed virologic withdrawal developed resistance to RPV, but not DTG [2]. Other clinical trials of suppressed patients switched to DTG monotherapy revealed that a high proportion of virologic failures (VFs) developed DTG resistance [4–6]. This suggests that these regimens are ‘less forgiving’ in the setting of imperfect adherence which is more common in real-world scenarios [7]. Data from non-clinical trial settings would be useful to validate the real-world efficacy and barrier to resistance of DTG-based mono-and dual therapy.

Methods

This was a retrospective study to describe virologic outcomes of patients switched to DTG functional monotherapy, or functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine nucleoside analog (NA). Eligible patients included all HIV-1 infected patients seen at the Orlando Immunology Center between 8/13/13 – 11/22/14 switched to once-daily DCRs whose historical genotypes predicted that DTG alone or in combination with a non-cytosine NA were the only fully active antiretrovirals (ARVs). Historical genotypes included standard genotypic assays performed 1–9 years (median 7) prior to switch. Eligible patients were either suppressed or viremic at baseline, must have attended at least two clinic visits during the study period and had a minimum of two HIV-1 RNA measurements at least four weeks apart following switch. Patients with the following baseline mutations associated with reduced susceptibility to DTG: T66K, E92Q, G118R, E138 K/A/T, G140 S/A/C, Q148 H/R/K, N155H and R263K [8] were excluded. Informed consent was waived due to the retrospective nature of the study which utilized data collected as a part of routine clinical care.

Demographics, lab values and clinical parameters were extracted from the charts of eligible patients during DCR treatment until 12/31/2018. The primary endpoint was the proportion of patients achieving or maintaining an HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL following switch. Descriptive statistics were calculated for participant baseline demographic and clinical characteristics, virologic outcomes, and discontinuations throughout the study. The Sterling Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that the study met IRB exemption criteria based on the retrospective nature of the study (Sterling IRB ID 7115).

Results

During the study period, 559 treatment-experienced patients were switched to a DCR containing ≥ 3 ARVs. Of these, 19 (3%) were found to be on DTG functional monotherapy and 20 (3%) were found to be on functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine NA (9 on DTG + tenofovir disoproxil fumarate (TDF) and 11 on DTG + abacavir (ABC). The median age (range) of patients was 53 (40–74) years, 28 (72%)
had baseline HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL, and 11 (28%) had baseline HIV-1 RNA ≥ 50 copies/mL (Table 1). The median number (range) of ARV regimens prior to switch was 4 (1–11), 25 (64%) had previously used ≥ 2 nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs), and 24 (62%) were integrase strand transfer inhibitor (INSTI)-experienced. All patients had virus with the M184 V/I however 23 (59%) had additional NRTI resistance associated mutations (RAMs). Reasons for regimen switch included reducing pill burden (17/39), patient co-morbidities (9/39), persistent viremia (4/39), side effect concerns from prior regimen (2/39) and 7/39 had no reason documented (Table 1).
Table 1
Baseline demographic and clinical characteristics

| Characteristic                                      | N = 39       |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| **Median Age (range)**                             | 53 (40–74)   |
| **Sex**                                            |              |
| Male, n (%)                                        | 36 (92)      |
| Female, n (%)                                      | 3 (8)        |
| **Race/Ethnicity**                                 |              |
| Caucasian, n (%)                                   | 31 (80)      |
| Black, n (%)                                       | 4 (10)       |
| Hispanic, n (%)                                    | 4 (10)       |
| Other, n (%)                                       | 0            |
| **Median BMI (range)**                             | 25.9 (17.3–36.4) |
| **Baseline HIV Viral Load**                        |              |
| <50 copies/mL, n (%)                               | 28 (72)      |
| 50–200 copies/mL, n (%)                            | 6 (15)       |
| 201–399 copies/mL, n (%)                           | 2 (5)        |
| ≥400 copies/mL, n (%)                              | 3 (8)        |
| **Median Baseline CD4+ cell count, cells/mm³ (range)** | 564 (92-1217) |
| **HIV Disease status**                             |              |
| Asymptomatic, n (%)                                | 32 (82)      |
| Symptomatic, n (%)                                 | 7 (18)       |
| AIDS, n (%)                                        | 0            |
| **Prior ARV Experience**                           |              |
| >2 NRTIs, n (%)                                    | 25 (64)      |
| 1 INSTI, n (%)                                     | 22 (56)      |
| >1 INSTI, n (%)                                    | 2 (5)        |
| **Median Number of ARV regimens prior to DCR (range)** | 4 (1–11)    |
| **Baseline DCR**                                   |              |
| DTG functional monotherapy, n (%)                  | 19 (49)      |
| DTG + non-cytosine nucleoside analog, n (%)        | 20 (51)      |
| DTG + TDF, n (%)                                   | 9 (23)       |
| DTG + ABC, n (%)                                   | 11 (28)      |

**Abbreviations.**

BMI, body mass index; ARV, antiretroviral; NRTI, nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor; NNRTI, non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitor; PI, protease inhibitor; INSTI, integrase strand transfer inhibitor; DCR, DTG containing regimen; DTG, dolutegravir; TDF, tenofovir disoproxil fumarate; ABC, abacavir; RAM, resistance associated mutation
Following switch, 32/39 (82%) patients achieved or maintained an HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL, and 7 (18%) patients experienced persistent HIV-1 RNA ≥ 50 copies/mL. The median duration (range) of follow-up was 50 weeks (12–244). Eighty-nine percent (17/19) of patients treated with functional DTG monotherapy had HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL compared to 75% (15/20) of those treated with functional dual therapy with DTG + non-cytosine NA. Of those with persistent viremia, 2 were on DTG functional monotherapy, and 5 were on functional dual therapy (2 on DTG + TDF and 3 on DTG + ABC) (Table 2). Three had baseline HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL, and four had baseline HIV-1 RNA ≥ 50 copies/mL. All had baseline M184V/I, and 2 had additional NRTI RAMs. Five had suboptimal adherence documented throughout the study period whereas 2 had “100% adherence” documented at all visits. The majority (5/7) had genotypic testing performed post-switch and there was no evidence of treatment-emergent resistance in 5/5 patients. At the end of the study period, one viremic patient was lost to follow-up and 6/7 were switched to alternative regimens; in 5 of these patients the alternative regimen included DTG. All patients achieved HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL on their new regimens (Table 2).
Table 2
Clinical details and follow-up for patients with persistent HIV-1 RNA ≥ 50 copies/mL (N = 7)

| Patient | Baseline DCR | Baseline RAMs | Active ARVs in DCR | HIV-1 RNA (cps/mL) | Suspected reason for non-response | Treatment-emergent RAMs | Date of DCR DC and new ARV regimen | HIV-1 RNA following DCR DC (cps/mL) |
|---------|--------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Patient 1 | DTG + TDF/FTC | M184V/I | DTG + TDF | BL: <50 | Unclear, 100% compliance reported | No post-treatment GT | DC at W48, changed to ETR/DRV/r/DTG | W52: <50 on new regimen |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W24: 50, 51 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W48: 2598 | | | |
| Patient 2 | DTG + ABC/3TC | M184V/I | DTG + ABC | BL: <50 | Non-compliance | | DC at W52, changed to ABC/3TC/DTG/DRV/r | W55: <50 on new regimen |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W12:250 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W52:1023 | | | |
| Patient 3 | DTG/ABC/3TC | M184V/I | DTG + ABC | BL: <50 | Unclear, 100% compliance reported | No post-treatment GT | DC at W48, switched to DTG/DRV/c | W56: <50 on new regimen |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W8:<50 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W28:<50 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W48:80, 90 | | | |
| Patient 4 | DTG + TDF/FTC | M41L, M184V/IT215Y | DTG + TDF | BL: 70 | Non-compliance | | DC at W48, switch to ETR/TDF/FTC/DRV/r | W53: <50 on new regimen |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W8:30 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W16:130 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W32:570 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W48:120 | | | |
| Patient 5 | DTG + RPV | M184V/IE138E/K | DTG | BL: 170 | Non-compliance | | DC at W104, changed to DTG/DRV/c | W108: <50 on new regimen |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W20: 320 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W28: 130 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W40: 150 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W56:600 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W80:90 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W92:120 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W104:210 | | | |
| Patient 6 | DTG + ABC/3TC | M184V/M41L T215Y L74L/I | DTG | BL: 280 | Non-compliance | | DC at W24, changed to DTG/DRV/r | W48:60 on new regimen |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W4: 90 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W12:90 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W24:110 | | | |
| Patient 7 | DTG + ABC/3TC | M184V/I | DTG + ABC | BL: 1400 | Non-compliance | | Regimen continued, LTFU after W36 | LTFU after W36 |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W4:<50 | | | |
|          |              |               |                   |       | W36:724, 801 | | | |

**Abbreviations.** DCR, dolutegravir containing regimen; RAM, resistance associated mutation; ARV, antiretroviral; DC, discontinuation; DTG, dolutegravir; TDF, tenofovir; FTC, emtricitabine; ABC, abacavir; 3TC, lamivudine; RPV, rilpivirine; BL, baseline; W, week; GT, genotype; ETR, etravirine; DRV, darunavir; r, ritonavir; c, cobicistat; LTFU, lost to follow up

**Discussion**
Data from randomized clinical trials has demonstrated that 6–10% of virologically suppressed patients switched to DTG monotherapy experienced VF, and of those 29–100% developed INSTI resistance [4–6]. Studies evaluating virologically suppressed patients switched to dual DTG-based therapy with 3TC and RPV demonstrated VF rates of 1–3% and zero patients developed treatment-emergent INSTI resistance [2, 3]. In the case of DTG + RPV, 54% of VFs developed resistance to RPV [2]. In our cohort, 2/19 (11%) treated with DTG functional monotherapy and 5/20 (25%) treated with functional dual therapy with DTG plus a non-cytosine NA experienced VF. Of these, five had post-switch genotypes and none developed treatment emergent INSTI resistance (Table 2).

The most likely reasons for VF in our cohort included suboptimal adherence and the presence of significant baseline resistance. Of non-adherent VFs, two were on functional DTG monotherapy, and three were on DTG + non-cytosine NA. Of those on functional monotherapy, one was on DTG + RPV and had baseline E138E/K which reduces RPV susceptibility [8]. The other was on DTG + ABC/3TC and had baseline M184V/I, L74I, M41L and T215Y, the combination of which severely reduces susceptibility to 3TC and ABC [8]. In both patients, the presence of these baseline RAMs may have contributed to VF.

Among the three non-adherent VFs on functional dual therapy, two were on DTG + ABC and only had baseline M184V/I whereas the other was on DTG + TDF and had baseline M184V/I, M41L and T215Y. In addition to reduced 3TC and emtricitabine susceptibility, the M184V/I mutation is associated with low-level ABC resistance and may have contributed to VF in those on DTG + ABC [8]. In contrast, this mutation is associated with increased TDF susceptibility and the delay of treatment emergent TDF resistance [8]. However, in the patient on DTG + TDF this “hypersensitizing” effect may have been reduced by the presence of baseline M41L and T215Y which in combination are associated with low-to-intermediate-level TDF resistance and may have contributed to VF in this patient [8]. Nonetheless, 32/39 patients in our cohort with similar baseline resistance on functional DTG-based mono-and-dual therapy achieved or maintained virologic suppression suggesting that the primary reason for VF in these patients was likely non-adherence. This is also supported by the fact that 4/5 non-adherent VFs had baseline HIV-1 RNA ≥ 50 copies/mL which likely indicates a history of non-adherence prior to study entry.

Post-switch genotypes were only available for the 5 non-adherent VFs, and 4 of these were obtained on DTG. We observed no treatment-emergent NRTI or INSTI resistance, and 3/5 patients subsequently went on to achieve HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL on a different DCR after discontinuation of the study regimen. One patient achieved HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL on a non-DCR and the other was lost to follow up (Table 1). Though based on a small sample, this observation reinforces the high genetic barrier to resistance of DTG and its forgiveness in the setting of non-adherence, even in patients with pre-existing ARV resistance.

Two VFs were documented as 100% adherent, both were on functional dual therapy; one was on DTG + TDF and the other was on DTG + ABC. Both had baseline M184V/I without additional NRTI mutations. In the patient on DTG + ABC, the reduction in ABC susceptibility conferred by the M184V/I may have contributed to VF. However, in the other on DTG + TDF, this mutation is expected to increase TDF susceptibility and does not fully explain VF development. Baseline mutations may have contributed to VF in these cases; however, it is unknown how accurate their documented adherence patterns were and whether non-adherence may have also played a role.

In 32/39 patients on functional DTG-based mono-and dual therapy, HIV-1 RNA < 50 copies/mL was achieved and maintained throughout the study period. All patients received DCRs with ≥ 3 ARVs, and though baseline resistance testing predicted either functional-mono or, dual therapy, we acknowledge the possibility of partial activity from other ARVs deemed not fully active. This may explain the high virologic response rates observed in our study and the lack of treatment emergent INSTI resistance in those with VF due to “protection” of DTG by these partially active agents.

Limitations of this study include a small sample size, the retrospective nature of the analysis, the lack of control group, possible inaccuracy of documented information, and that data are from a single center in the Southeastern United States. However, this is the first report of outcomes of patients treated with functional DTG-based mono-and-dual therapy from a US cohort and may provide important insight into DTG-based treatment strategies with fewer ARVs.

**Declarations**

**Funding:**

This work was supported by a research grant from ViiV Healthcare, ViiV GSK 209995 (PI: Rolle). The funder had no role in the study design, data collection, data interpretation, writing of the report or decision to submit the article for publication.

**Address for reprint requests:**

Charlotte-Paige Rolle, MD MPH
Author Contributions:

All authors listed have contributed sufficiently to the project to be included as authors, and all those who are qualified to be authors are listed in the author byline.

The specific credit roles of the authors are included below:

Charlotte-Paige Rolle: conceptualization, data curation, formal analysis, funding acquisition, preparation of the original draft, review and editing, and final approval of the submitted version

Vu Nguyen: methodology, formal analysis, and final approval of the submitted version

Federico Hinestrosa: conceptualization, review and editing, and final approval of the submitted version

Edwin DeJesus: conceptualization, funding acquisition, preparation of the original draft, review and editing and final approval of the submitted version

Author Disclosures:

Dr. Charlotte-Paige Rolle has received research grants and honoraria from Gilead Sciences, ViiV Healthcare, Theratechnologies and Janssen Infectious Diseases during the conduct of this study. Dr. Federico Hinestrosa has received honoraria from Gilead Sciences, Merck, and AbbVie during the conduct of this study. Dr. Edwin DeJesus has received honoraria from Gilead Sciences, Theratechnologies, and Janssen Pharmaceuticals during the conduct of this study.

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