

The Tina Trial: Progress on a phase 3 randomised double-blind placebo-controlled trial of mirtazapine as a pharmacotherapy for methamphetamine use disorder

The Difference is Research

Keygan J¹, Palmer L¹, Saunders L¹, Degan T¹, Hayllar J², Sinclair B³, Reid D³, Cordaro F³, Kelly P⁴, Christmass M⁵, Hill H⁶, Lundin R⁶, Turner A⁷, Dean O⁷, Berk M⁷, Dore G⁸, Shoptaw S⁹, Goodman-Meza D¹⁰, Clare P¹¹, Arunogiri S¹², Colledge-Frisby S^{1,13}, Koeijers J¹, Morrison C⁷, Wrobel A⁷, Kontogiannis A⁴, Thomas T⁴, Hatton E⁴, Farrell M¹, Degenhardt L¹, McKetin R¹.

Background

Methamphetamine use disorder is a significant public health concern in Australia and internationally. There are no TGA approved pharmacotherapies for methamphetamine use disorder.

Two Phase 2 clinical trials in the USA found that the generic anti-depressant medication, mirtazapine, significantly reduced methamphetamine use relative to placebo [1,2].

These findings indicate the need for a larger Phase 3 trial to confirm benefits in routine clinical practice.

Aim

The aim of this clinical trial is to assess whether take-home oral mirtazapine can be used safely and effectively in routine clinical care to help people with a methamphetamine use disorder reduce their methamphetamine use.

We hypothesise that 12 weeks of take-home oral mirtazapine treatment (30 mg/day) will reduce methamphetamine use, reduce depressive symptoms, improve sleep, improve quality of life, and reduce HIV risk, relative to placebo.

Methods

Design: A multi-site randomised double-blind placebo-controlled trial (Figure 1).

Registration: ACTRN12622000235707

Target population: 340 participants aged 18-65 years, who are currently using methamphetamine and meet DSM 5 criteria for a moderate to severe methamphetamine use disorder.

Exclusions: Taking antidepressants, pregnancy, a past year suicide attempt, contraindications for mirtazapine.

Setting: Alcohol and other drug services in Geelong, Wollongong, Brisbane, Perth. Additional sites to be added in 2024.

Intervention: Participants will be randomly assigned to receive either 12 weeks of take-home oral mirtazapine (30 mg/day) or equivalent placebo.



Figure 2: Medication bottles with MEMS Smartcaps®

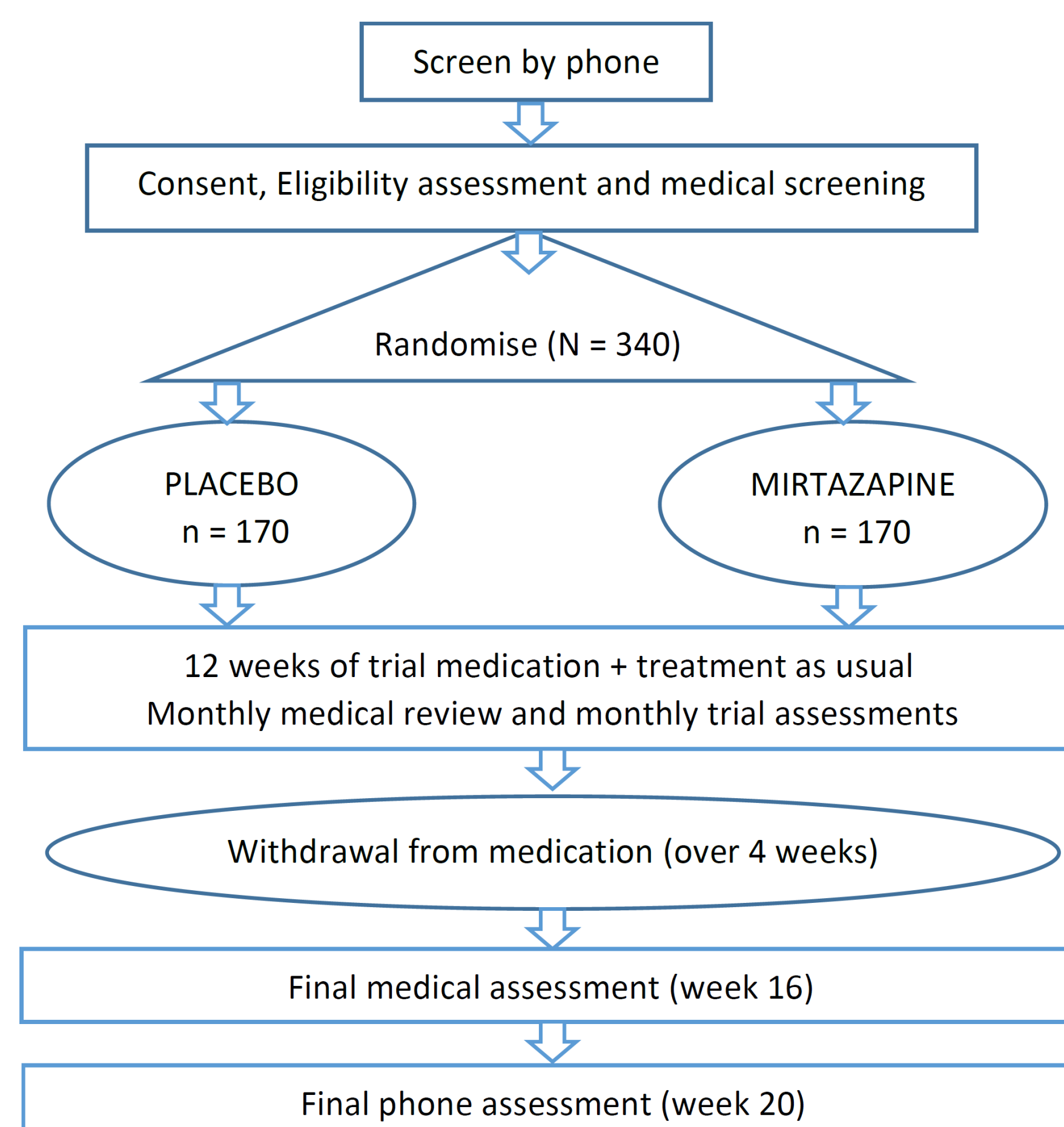


Figure 1: Flow diagram for trial assessments

Measures

Primary endpoint:

Self-reported days of methamphetamine use in the 4 weeks prior to week 12, assessed using the Timeline Followback.

Secondary endpoints:

Abstinence: Methamphetamine negative oral fluid samples

Depression: Patient Health Questionnaire - 9

Sleep: Athens Insomnia Scale

HIV Risk: HIV Risk-Taking Behaviour Scale from the Opiate Treatment Index.

Quality of life: EuroQOL-5D

Tertiary endpoints:

Other substance use, suicidality, anxiety, patient impression, medication tolerability, medication adherence (using MEMS Smartcaps®, Figure 2), work productivity, health service use and contact with the criminal justice system.

Progress

Recruitment for the Tina Trial commenced in November 2022. As of August 30, 2023, 109 participants had been randomised (Brisbane 51, Geelong 17, Perth 24, Wollongong 17). The follow-up rate over all 10 assessments was 87% (81% at week 12).

Randomised participants had used methamphetamine on a median of 24 days in the past 4 weeks at the start of the trial (IQR 17-28 days), 53% injected methamphetamine and 99% used the crystalline form of the drug. Fifty-three per cent screened positive for major depression on the PHQ-9. Forty-three per cent had never received treatment or other professional help for their methamphetamine use disorder.

Implications

If mirtazapine is found to be safe and effective, the trial will provide evidence to support methamphetamine use disorder being included as one of the indicated uses for mirtazapine. This may allow mirtazapine to be prescribed as a PBS Schedule 4 medication for methamphetamine use disorder, providing a potentially scalable and relatively low-cost intervention



References

- [1] Colfax GN, Santos GM, Das M, Santos DM, Matheson T, Gasper J, Shoptaw S, Vittinghoff E. Mirtazapine to reduce methamphetamine use: A randomized controlled trial. *Archives of General Psychiatry* 2011;68:1168-75
- [2] Coffin PO, Santos GM, Hern J, Vittinghoff E, Walker JE, Matheson T, Santos D, Colfax G, Batki SL. Effects of Mirtazapine for Methamphetamine Use Disorder Among Cisgender Men and Transgender Women Who Have Sex With Men: A Placebo-Controlled Randomized Clinical Trial. *JAMA psychiatry* 2019

¹ National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW ² Biala, Metro North Health, Brisbane ³ Illawarra Drug and Alcohol Service, Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District, NSW Health, Wollongong ⁴ School of Psychology, University of Wollongong ⁵ Next Step Community Alcohol and Drug Service, East Perth ⁶ Drug and Alcohol Services, Barwon Health, Geelong ⁷ IMPACT Trials, Deakin University ⁸ Kirby Institute, UNSW ⁹ Department of Family Medicine, UCLA ¹⁰ Division of Infectious Diseases, David Geffen School of Medicine, UCLA ¹¹ Prevention Research Collaboration, The University of Sydney ¹² Turning Point and Monash Addiction Research Centre, Eastern Health Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne ¹³ National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University.