Epoetin and darbepoetin for managing anemia in patients undergoing cancer treatment: comparative effectiveness update

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Authors' objectives
To update the 2006 systematic review of the comparative benefits and harms of erythropoiesis-stimulating agent (ESA) strategies and non-ESA strategies to manage anemia in patients undergoing chemotherapy and/or radiation for malignancy (excluding myelodysplastic syndrome and acute leukemia), including the impact of alternative thresholds for initiating treatment and optimal duration of therapy.

Authors' conclusions
Results of this update were consistent with the 2006 review. ESAs reduced the need for transfusions and increased the risk of thromboembolism. FACT-Fatigue scores were better with ESA use but the magnitude was less than the minimal clinically important difference. An increase in mortality accompanied the use of ESAs. An important unanswered question is whether dosing practices and overall ESA exposure might influence harms.

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