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Tirzepatide - role in obesity, health and physical wellness. Information overview

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Abstract

Nowadays there is an increasing number of people with overweight and obesity all around the world. Unhealthy food, sweets and fast foods are available everywhere, that causes self-perpetuating problem. Food restriction is an obvious treatment, but it is difficult to achieve. A certain solution are GLP-1 agonists using to treat type 2 diabetes. Last studies shown that that medicaments may be effective in promoting weight loss. Tirzepatide as a novelty and is a long-acting dual agonist of glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide (GIP) and glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1) receptors. It can be very supportive in the fight against obesity.

Current state of knowledge

High effectiveness of tirzepatide has been observed already in 2021 and has been proven in five phase III clinical trials (SURPASS 1-5). In may 2022 a medicine was approved by the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) and in November 2022 was registered by EMA (European Medicines Agency) for the v of type 2 diabetes. After a lot of reports of successful use for weight loss in patients, doctors began using it off-label to treat obesity.

Scientists created the SURMOUNT development program aims to evaluate the efficacy and safety of tirzepatide as an addition to lifestyle modification (compared with placebo) on chronic weight control in adults with BMI ≥ 27 kg/m² with accompanying or not type 2 diabetes. Based on the PubMed electronic database, the results will be presented below.

Keywords: tirzepatide, GLP-1, GIP, obesity, type 2 diabetes, SURMOUNT, FDA, EMA

1. Introduction

Obesity is a complex, chronic disease [1], which is an abnormal or excessive accumulation of fat tissue, posing a threat to health. It is a serious condition, which increase the risk of many other diseases such as: coronary heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, stroke, fatty liver disease, obstructive sleep apnea, osteoarthritis and dementia [1]. New study (in 2022) released that more than 1 billion people in the world are living with obesity, which means that one in eight people is obese now [6]:

- 2.5 billion (43%) adults (18 years and older) are overweight - 890 million (16%) of these are living with obesity [6]
- 37 million children under the age of 5 are overweight [6]

- Over 390 million children and adolescents (aged 5–19 years) are overweight - 160 million of these are living with obesity [6]

All over the world, amount of adult obesity has more than doubled since 1990, and has quadrupled among children and adolescents (5 to 19 years of age) [6] [7].

Obesity has achieved epidemic proportions globally. 2.8 million people are dying as a result of being overweight or obese every year [5].

World Obesity Federation published statistics, which depicts that the global level of overweight and obesity will reach \$4.32 trillion annually by 2035 if prevention and treatment measures will not be betterment [8]. For this reason, tirzepatide may be a breakthrough in the treatment of this condition and there are high hopes for a new medicament.

2. Diagnosis of obesity

There are various methods that can be used to diagnose obesity. According to the World Health Organization (WHO) the gold standard for diagnosing obesity is the Body Mass Index - BMI. It is calculated as weight in kilograms divided by the height in metres squared. In adults, overweight, or pre-obesity, is defined as a BMI of 25-29.9 kg/m², while a BMI \geq 30 kg/m² defines obesity and BMI \geq 40 kg/m² defines severe obesity. [2, 3, 4]

However, this index is very limited (BMI has high specificity 94–96% in men and 98–100% in women but low sensitivity 35–37% in men and 48–50% in women) therefore if the BMI is above the appropriate ethnic guidelines, then there are a number of steps needed to evaluate the importance of that deviation [9].

The first restriction of the BMI is that it does not provide any information how body fat is distributed. Waist circumference is the measure of choice to define central fat distribution and central obesity. Complications, obesity-related health risk and significant increased risk of mortality is depended more on waist circumference (WC), not BMI. This has been confirmed by various researches comparing also other indexes (hip circumference (WHR), weight divided by height (Wt/Height) or WC/height). WC measurement is a cheap and easy method. The cut-off point is various among the countries, in Poland it is \geq 88cm for woman and \geq 102 cm for men [10, 11].

A second limitation of the BMI is that it has only a fair correlation with real content of body fat. It is important that measures of fatness should be as close to the actual amount of fat as it is possible. There are many methods. Anthropometric methods are among the oldest. Bioelectric impedance and body density measurements show two-compartment model with fat and non-fat tissue. Dual X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) can measure three sections which including fat, lean, bone and regional location of arms, legs or trunk fat. Ultrasound elastography can outline tissue disease in the liver and kidney [11, 13].

On the other hand there are more precise measurements obtained from magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) and computed tomography (CT) - it provides pictures of body fat [11, 12].

Finally there are genetic, metabolic, physiological or psychological factors involved in the development of obesity. BMI tells us nothing about these aspects, however they are very important and they have a big impact on gain weight [11].

All of these methods improve on the BMI and supply better pictures of fat distribution in the body.

3. Structure of tirzepatide

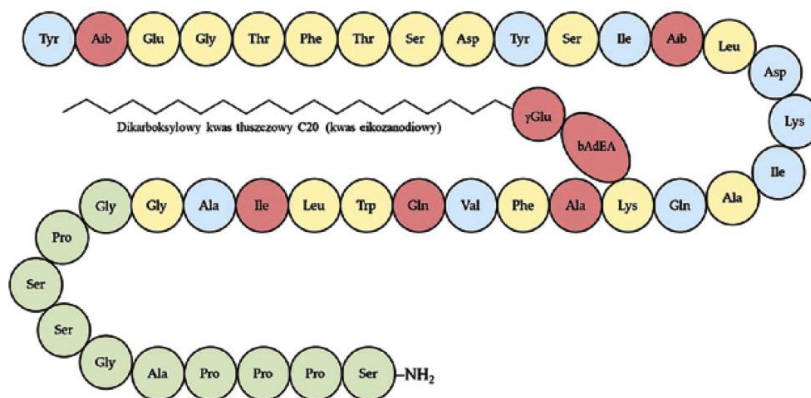
Tirzepatide is a peptide with the formula C₂₂₅H₃₄₈N₄₈O₆₈ and a molecular weight of 4813.45 Da. It contains 39 amino-acids in the chain, shows structural similarity to both incretin hormones and activates GLP-1 and GIP receptors simultaneously. The final 10 amino

acids including the amide group at the C-terminus are consistent with the sequence of exenatide [14, 15, 16].

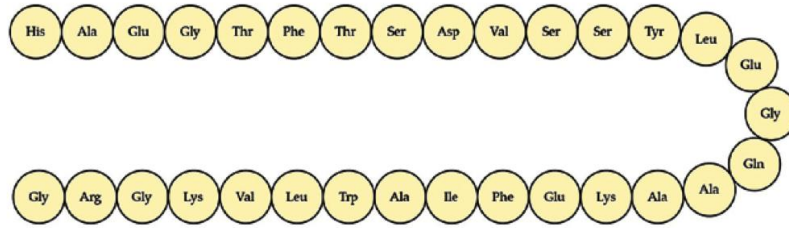
At 2 and 13 position of tirzepatide chain are two non-coding amino-acid residues (α -aminoisobutyric acid; Aib), which are responsible for its resistance to the enzyme dipeptidyl peptidase IV (DPP-4). As a consequence, medicament has a long half-life (6 days) and high affinity for albumin [16, 17, 18].

A C20 dicarboxylic fatty acid residue (eicosanedioic acid) is linked to lysine at position 20 via a hydrophilic linker composed of γ -glutamic acid and bis aminodiethoxyacetyl. This part enhances the binding of the drug to the GLP-1 receptor [16, 18].

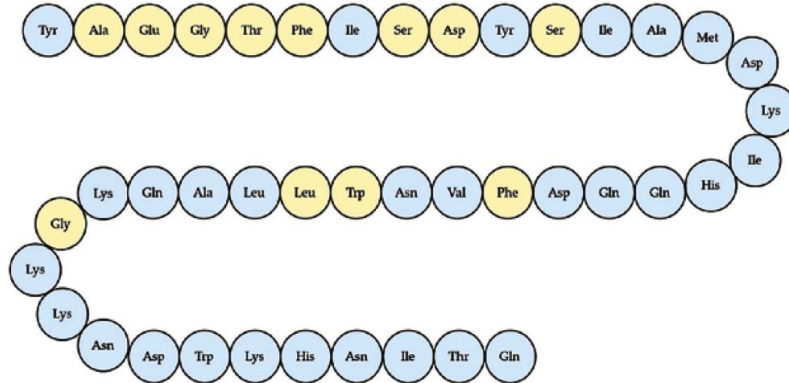
Tirzepatyd



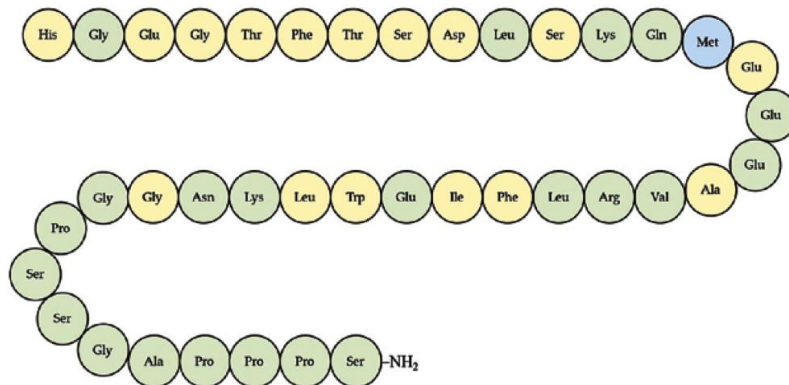
GLP-1



GIP



Eksepatyd



Legend:

Ala - Alanine, Arg - Arginine, Asn - Asparagine, Asp - Aspartic Acid, Gln - Glutamine, Gly - Glycine, Glu - Glutamic Acid, His - Histidine, Ile - Isoleucine, Leu - Leucine, Lys - Lysine, Met - Methionine, Phe - Phenylalanine, Pro - Proline, Ser - Serine, Thr - Threonine, Trp - Tryptophan, Tyr - Tyrosine, Val - Valine, Air - α -aminoisobutyric acid, bAdEA - bis- aminodiethoxyacetyl
Color indicates similarity to fragment of another molecule: yellow - GLP-1, blue - GIP, green - exenatide, pink - tirzepatide.

Source: https://stn.ump.edu.pl/prace_naukowe/05_SZ_Tirzepatyd_n.pdf

3.1. Mechanism of action

GIP and GLP-1 are produced in the small intestine cells and secreted in response to ingestion of meals or glucose. GIP and GLP-1 exert their effects by binding to specific receptors, the GIP receptor (GIPR) and the GLP-1 receptor (GLP-1R), which belong to the G-protein coupled receptor family. Hormones activate and increase the level of intracellular cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) in pancreatic β cells, thereby stimulating insulin secretion glucose-dependently (when the glucose concentration exceeds 5 mmol/L). Within the pancreas, GIP and GLP-1 in common promote β -cell proliferation and inhibit apoptosis,

thereby pancreatic β -cell mass is increasing. Moreover GLP-1 suppresses postprandial glucagon secretion significantly and slows down gastric emptying [17, 19, 20].

In addition, GIP and GLP-1 have functions in various biological processes in different tissues. GLP-1 receptors are distributed on α cells of islets and in cell membranes of the brain, blood vessels, heart, lungs, cells of the immune system, intestines, and GIP in tissue fat, heart, pituitary gland, vascular endothelium and adrenal cortex [17, 19, 20].

In adipose tissues, GIP but not GLP-1 facilitates fat deposition. In bone, GIP promotes bone formation while GLP-1 inhibits bone absorption. GIP and GLP-1 are thought to be involved in processes in the brain (memory formation as well as the control of appetite). In addition to these differences, secretion of GIP and GLP-1 and their insulinotropic effects on β -cells have been shown to differ in patients with type 2 diabetes compared to healthy subjects [17, 19, 20].

Common action both incretins enhances the beneficial effect on the treatment of type 2 diabetes and obesity. The action of tirzepatide is based on severe activation of the GLP-1 signaling pathway [21]. It mobilizes insulin secretion dependent on glucose, through the GIP-receptor activity. Due to long half-life, tirzepatide extends the safe blood level of glucose: 71-140 mg/dl [21].

Table 1. Action of incretin hormones

	GLP-1	GIP
	Glucagon-like peptide-1	Glucose-dependent insulinotropic polypeptide
Number of acids	39	42
Secretion	L cells of the ileal and colonic mucosa	K cells of the duodenum, jejunal mucosa and proximal ileum
Receptors	Cells of the brain, blood vessels, heart, immune system, intestines, lungs, kidneys, α and β pancreas	Pancreatic β -cells, intestine, adipose tissue, heart, pituitary gland, adrenal cortex, vascular endothelium
Impulse	Carbohydrate-fat meal	—
Insulin secretion (from pancreatic β -cells) effect	Stimulation is glucose dependent	—
Glucagon secretion effect	Decrease	—
Gastric emptying effect	Slow down	Minimal impact

Feeling of satiety effect	Increase	—
Appetite effect	Decrease	—
Postprandial glycemia effect	Decrease	—
Body weight effect	Decrease	—
Pancreatic β -cells effect	Protective effects - cell apoptosis inhibition, proliferation and differentiation stimulation	
Somatostatin secretion (in D-cells of the intestinal mucosa and pancreatic δ -cells) effect	Decrease	

Dose of tirzepatide 15 mg elevates insulin sensitivity in the whole body by 63% and increases pancreatic β cells sensitivity to glucose [21]. The study proved this dependence with participation type 2 diabetes patients by using a hyperglycemic clamp. Compared to the initial state, tirzepatide increased insulin secretion in the first phase by 466%, and in the second by 302% [22].

Tirzepatide reduces appetite and calories intake in a meal. Drug slows down gastric emptying which may retard the rate of glucose absorption after a meal and be beneficial for maintaining proper postprandial glycemia [20, 23].

Treatment with tirzepatide was studied in high-fat diet-fed obese IR mice. The results manifested: body weight reduction, less food intake and plasma leptin devaluation. It also elevated feeling of satiety, cut preference for sweets and a high-fat diet, as well as increased energy expenditure, after the introduction a GIP and GLP-1 agonist [24].

4. Tirzepatide - dosage

The starting dose ought to be 2,5 mg once a week, afterwards dose should be increased after 4 weeks of treatment to 5 mg once a week. If the 5 mg dose is ineffective, it can be increased by another 2,5 mg after another 4 weeks. The maximum dose - 15 mg once a week. There is no specific time of day when the drug should be used [26].

4.1. Tirzepatide - mechanism of action

In pharmacokinetic studies conducted with healthy volunteers, tirzepatide were given in a dose from 0.25 mg to 15 mg. Drug should be injected into the arm, thigh or abdomen

subcutaneously [25, 26]. Average bioavailability is 80% [25, 26]. The time to reach maximum plasma concentration is 8 to 72 hours [25, 26].

The mean steady-state volume of tirzepatide distribution (Vd) is approximately 10.3 L. It is highly bound to plasma albumin (99%) [26].

The average half-life was 5 days, which imply a weekly dosing [25, 26].

Metabolism of tirzepatide: the peptide structure undergoes proteolytic cleavage and the C20 fatty-diacid composition undergoes β -oxidation and amide hydrolysis. Drug is metabolizing into individual amino acids in various tissues (including the liver) and excreted mainly in urine and feces [26, 27].

The pharmacokinetics is not significantly dependent on age, gender, ethnicity, body weight, race, or hepatic or renal impairment [26, 27].

4.2. Tirzepatide - contraindications

Anaphylaxis, angioedema and prior serious hypersensitivity - on the drug or its excipients (sodium chloride, sodium phosphate dibasic heptahydrate) are an absolute contraindications for use [26, 27].

Drug is contraindicated also in patients with Thyroid C-cell tumors. Studies with animal participation demonstrate that tirzepatide caused medullary thyroid carcinoma in rats [27]. However the drug effect in humans is unknown thus patients with a family history of multiple endocrine neoplasia syndrome type-2 (MEN-2) should be careful [26, 27].

GLP-1 receptor agonists are associated with acute pancreatitis. During the tirzepatide clinical trials SURPASS-1 and SURPASS-3 was noticed increase of pancreatic lipase and amylase. And in SURPASS-2 were observed 4 cases of pancreatitis. If pancreatitis is suspected tirzepatide should be immediately discontinued [27].

Acute gallbladder disease is associated with exenatide treatment and it was observed in tirzepatide trial SURPASS-2. Tirzepatide injections may be cause of diabetic retinopathy progression.

These conditions are relative contraindications for tirzepatide therapy (caution is advised) [26, 27].

4.3. Tirzepatide - adverse effects

The primary adverse effects are related to gastrointestinal tract. Decreased appetite is the most common [28].

Nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, acid reflux, dyspepsia, abdominal pain are less frequently [28].

Pancreatitis, cholelithiasis, acute kidney injury, sinus tachycardia are infrequent [28].

Patient using tirzepatide during GLP-1 agents/insulin therapy increase the risk of hypoglycemia [28].

5. Clinical trial results

Tirzepatide has been extensively studied in double-blind, randomised and global controlled phase III clinical trials SURPASS 1-5. These studies proved the long-term efficacy and safety of this treatment in people with type 2 diabetes [29, 30].

Tirzepatide in dose 5 mg, 10 mg, 15 mg was compared with:

- Placebo in monotherapy - SURPASS-1 [30]
- Semaglutide 1 mg (selective GLP-1 RA) (background medication: metformin) - SURPASS-2 [30]

- Insulin degludec (background medication: metformin ± Sodium-glucose Cotransporter-2 [SGLT-2] inhibitor) - SURPASS-3 [30]
- Insulin glargine (background medication: metformin ± SGLT-2 inhibitor or sulfonylurea alone or in combination) - SURPASS-4 [30]
- Placebo (background medication: insulin glargine ± metformin) - SURPASS-5 [30]

Results reveal that the percent of members with tirzepatide achieving an HbA1c > 7,0% with ≥ 5% weight loss (without hypoglycemia) hesitated from 43% to 82% in SURPASS-1-5. Trial with Semaglutide 1 mg (SURPASS-2) achieved 51%, probe with placebo (SURPASS-1/5) reached 4% to 5% and studies with basal insulin (SURPASS-3/4) attained 5% [30, 40].

The scale of participants achieving an HbA1c ≥ 6.5% with ≥ 5% weight loss (without hypoglycaemia) were significantly higher with all tirzepatide doses than with comparators (placebo, Semaglutide and basal insulin) across all five SURPASS trials. Tirzepatide arms ranged from 38% to 78% across trials, the comparator arms achieved 3% for placebo (SURPASS-1/5), 3%-4% for basal insulin (SURPASS-3/4) and 45% for Semaglutide 1 mg (SURPASS-2) [30, 40].

The number of participants attaining an HbA1c ≥ 5,7% with ≥ 5% weight loss (without hypoglycemia) were noticeably superior with all tirzepatide doses. These values ranged from 16% to 51%. Placebo arms were about 1% (SURPASS-1/5), basal insulin arms hesitated between 1-2% (SURPASS-3/4) and Semaglutide 1 mg arms achieved 15% (SURPASS-2) [30, 40].

These endpoints expose the superior efficacy of tirzepatide versus other examined comparators in lowering HbA1c and weight reduction [30, 40].

In conclusion, tirzepatide impact clinically meaningful composite endpoints in therapy type 2 diabetes and in weight loss (without hypoglycemia). These results were consistent across the different populations [30, 40].

6. Clinical trial results continuation

Prevent studies with tirzepatide have shown a strong impact on weight loss. New, targeted trials have been created to investigate safety and direct influence of tirzepatide as an adjunct to lifestyle intervention in adults with BMI ≥ 27 kg/m² with or without type 2 diabetes. The SURMOUNT, multicenter, randomized, placebo-controlled, double-blind program, includes four global phase 3 trials. Participants are adults ≥ 18 years old, with a history of ≥ 1 unsuccessful, self-reported dietary effort to lose weight. Excluding factors: type 1 diabetes and adults with a self-reported weight loss > 5 kg 90 days before screening [31].

SURMOUNT-1 (72 weeks duration): evaluation in adults with obesity or overweight. Dosing once a week - 5 mg, 10 mg, 15 mg and placebo (1:1:1:1) [31, 32].

A body-weight reduction in the range ≥ 5% is clinically significant and improves metabolic health. In this trial most of participants (89%-91%) achieved this benchmark receiving 10 mg and 15 mg dose of tirzepatide. Weight reduction of ≥ 10%, ≥ 15%, ≥ 20% was reached by 78%-84%, 67%-71% and 50%-57% participants respectively [31, 32].

For perspective: placebo provided a 3,1% weight reduction, older antiobesity medications approved by the FDA assured approximately 3,0 to 8,6% weight reduction and semaglutide 2,4 mg resulted 12,4% weight reduction [36]. Trial demonstrated additional benefits of using tirzepatide such as: reducing cardiovascular and metabolic risk factors (systolic and diastolic blood pressure, lipid levels), cutting of waist circumference and transitioning a prediabetes into normoglycemia [31, 32].

SURMOUNT-2 (72 weeks duration): evaluation in adults with obesity and type 2 diabetes. Dosing once a week - 10 mg, 15 mg and placebo (1:1:1) [31, 34].

Both tirzepatide doses achieved all endpoints throughout the whole trial [35]. Mean body weight reductions achieved 12,8% participants (10 mg dose), 14,7% (15 mg dose), compared to placebo 3,2% [35].

Amount of participants who have reached at least $\geq 15\%$ body weight reduction: 40% (10 mg) and 48% (15 mg), compared to placebo - 3% [35].

HbA1c level $< 5,7\%$ was achieved by a 46% participants (10 mg dose) nad 49% members (15 mg dose), compared to placebo - 4% [35].

Moreover, this trial demonstrated significantly reduction in systolic blood pressure, fasting triglycerides and non-HDL-cholesterol [35].

SURMOUNT-3 (72 weeks duration): evaluation in adults with obesity or overweight and comorbidity after lifestyle modification. Maximum tolerated dose once a week - 10 mg or 15 mg and placebo (1:1) [31, 36].

During the 12-week intensive lifestyle modification qualified participants lost 6,9% of body weight. Members, who maintained 80% of their weight loss during the lifestyle intervention reached 94% in the tirzepatide team, compared to 43,8% in the placebo group [37].

Total weight reduction, during the whole study, ranged 24,3% with tirzepatide and 4,5% with placebo [37].

After 72-weeks of treatment, mean weight reduction was 18,4% in the tirzepatide group, compared to 2,5% with placebo. Endpoint of 5% body weight reduction achieved 87,5% participants in tirzepatide team, compared to 16,5% with placebo [37].

Trial demonstrated accompanying waist circumference decreasing, blood pressure improving, fasting lipid levels and reducing HbA1c [37].

SURMOUNT-4 (88 weeks duration): evaluation in adults with obesity or overweight and comorbidity treating for a 36 weeks lead-in period with tirzepatide followed by a 52-week double-blind placebo period. Maximum tolerated dose once a week - 10 mg or 15 mg and placebo (1:1) [31, 38].

After the 36-week lead-in period treatment participants achieved a mean 20,9% weight reduction. Subsequently, between 36 and 88-week of trial, weight decreased by another -5,5% with tirzepatide, and increased 14% with placebo [39].

Overall, 89,5% of participants (after the 88-week treatment with tirzepatide) maintained at least 80% of the weight loss obtained during the lead-in period and only 16,6% members maintained that weight loss with placebo [39].

Summing up, a mean weight reduction throughout whole study was 25,3% for tirzepatide and 9,9% for placebo [39].

7. Summary

Nowadays, obesity is a serious, dangerous and still growing problem. Current medications and attempt of insertion a diet and exercises are insufficient. New therapies and medicaments are still developing.

A certain breakthrough is a tirzepatide - subcutaneously medication, administered once a week.

Several years of trials have proven invaluable assistance of tirzepatide in type 2 diabetes treatment and complications (SURPASS trials), as well as decreasing level of obesity over the world (SURMOUNT trials).

Trials SURMOUNT-1 and -2 reveal that this drug seems to be a promising therapeutic option, providing effective glycemic control, weight loss and improvement of cardiometabolic parameters, making it a valuable tool in the treatment of type 2 diabetes and obesity. It is also much more effective than the older GLP-1 analogues and leads to greater weight loss.

Some experts believe that drugs for obesity should be used chronically, similarly to diabetes or hypertension. This thesis is also supported by observations from the previously mentioned SURMOUNT-4 study. Patients of tirzepatide group achieved a spectacular weight loss at the end of the study, relative to the second group received placebo (where noticed increase in body weight). Observations say that patients with diagnosed obesity, starting the drug for several months is pointless and does not bring lasting effects. For the time being, tirzepatide is a future in the daily treatment of bariatric patients but SURMOUNT-3 trial proved that it has to be connected with lifestyle change, a low-calorie diet and increased physical activity (together is the most effective).

However, elimination obesity over the world will solve many health problems and it will be a great opportunity to improve a patient's healthy life years, quality-adjusted life years and health-related quality of life so let's use this valuable tool - breakthrough drug tirzepatide in treatment and fight with obesity epidemic.

Disclosures

Author's contribution

Conceptualization - Anna Hanslik;
Methodology - Magdalena Mendak;
Software - Agnieszka Walczak;
Analysis - Agata Białek;
Investigation - Adrian Hovagimyan;
Resources - Monika Olszaniecka;
Data curation - Tomasz Olszaniecki, Adrian Hovagimyan;
Writing - Anna Hanslik;
Preparation - Anna Hanslik;
Visualization - Magdalena Mendak, Monika Olszaniecka;
Supervision - Agnieszka Walczak;
Project administration - Anna Hanslik, Agata Białek; receiving funding not applicable.
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Authors declare no conflict of interests.

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