Fatigue in primary biliary cirrhosis

We would like to take the opportunity to clarify some of the points in response to the recent leading article (Gut 2004;53:475–7) which accompanied our report of reduced globus pallidus (GP) magnetisation ratios (MTRs) in patients with fatigue and primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC).

As we stated in the paper, fatigue in PBC is a subjective multidimensional symptom with many potential determinants, including sleep disturbance, depression, and personality, in addition to a potential central neurological cause. We therefore wholeheartedly concur with Drs Milkiewicz and Heathcote when they state that brain manganese (Mn) deposition is certainly not the cause of fatigue in all patients with PBC. We certainly do not believe that we drew this conclusion. However, we do believe that our findings of reduced GP MTRs in patients with stage I–II disease, which were associated with hypermanganesaemia and measured fatigue, do open a novel avenue of research into a poorly understood symptom in patients with PBC.

In order to control for inter-examination system variability, it is necessary to normalise the raw MTRs against an internal region of interest (ROI). Although it might initially appear easier to analyse the raw MTR data, normalisation to an internal standard allows external sources of variation, unrelated to the patient, to be removed. We followed previously published protocols to calculate GP indices, normalised to the putamen and to the frontal white matter, and these were used to test associations with fatigue and blood Mn levels. The raw MTR data were used for the primary comparison between PBC patients and healthy volunteers. We chose two rather than one internal control ROI because, contrary to the assertion in the editorial, there is evidence for Mn accumulation in brain structures, other than the GP, in patients with cirrhosis. Rose et al reported significantly elevated Mn concentrations in the frontal and occipital cortex, pallidum, putamen, and caudate while Maeda et al showed elevated Mn concentrations in the GP, putamen, and frontal white matter. In both series, the highest Mn concentration was in the GP. Our choice of two standard ROIs was made to maximise the interpretation of the raw data although we accept that the a priori assumption that pathology is absent from these regions in this and all relevant magnetic resonance studies to date, which have used internal controls, may be false. This may explain the unexpected trend towards a positive association between blood Mn and the putaminal index normalised to white matter. Drs Milkiewicz and Heathcote have expressed concern about an apparent auto-correlation in our data that did not equal 1. Table 2 in our paper shows the correlation coefficients between individual MTR indices and blood Mn level. We did not compare the normalised putamen index against the normalised putamen index.

We are grateful to the two commentators for extending our interpretations and naturally agree that bile duct loss, rather than liver fibrosis, governs the severity of cholestasis and that there may be dissociation between these features in PBC. For the purposes of this study, we chose to examine patients with stage I–II disease to remove the possibility of hepatic encephalopathy or cirrhosis as a cause for the MTR findings. We believe that both this patient selection and the demonstration of normal cerebral magnetic resonance spectroscopy (MRS) in these patients, compared with healthy volunteers, does indeed achieve this. We found reduced GP MTRs in patients with stage I–II disease, which were associated with hypermanganesaemia and measured fatigue, but we also studied four patients with stage III–IV disease and, as a group, there were no significant differences in GP MTR indices compared with stage I–II patients. Although this may be due to the small number of individuals studied, the lack of clear distinction between stage I–II and stage III–IV disease may also reflect a process that adversely affects the brain long before the development of cirrhosis, owing to early bile duct loss.

The commentators point out that the value of liver biopsy staging of PBC is limited owing to sampling error and that there may not have been a true distinction between the stage I–II and III–IV groups. We accept the possibility of sampling error but, in our view, liver biopsy still remains the gold standard for diagnosing cirrhosis. We disagree with the suggestion that cerebral MRS would have been useful in supporting the histological diagnoses as cerebral MRS abnormalities are only seen in a minority of patients with Child-Pugh A cirrhosis. We did not assume that MRS would be abnormal in stage III–IV patients; in fact, there were no significant differences between these patients and stage I–II patients.

Fatigue in PBC merits further research. We hope that we will be able to take further “steps in the right direction”.

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

References


Acute ulcerative colitis during successful interferon/ribavirin treatment for chronic hepatitis C

A 54 year old man was treated with pegylated interferon alpha 2a 180 µg weekly and ribavirin 1000 mg daily for chronic hepatitis C genotype 3a (>5×10¹⁰ IU/ml). There was no history of gastrointestinal disease or morbidity.

At week 12, hepatitis C virus-polymerase chain reaction (HCV-PCR) was negative and alanine aminotransferase (ALT) and aspartate aminotransferase (AST) levels remained elevated at 2–3 times above the upper limit. Combination treatment was continued until week 24.

However, at week 14, the patient reported a sudden onset of watery and sometimes bloody diarrhoea. Colonoscopy showed continuous pancolitis with basal plasmocytosis, crypt abscesses, and crypt distortion, as seen in ulcerative colitis.

The antiviral treatment was stopped and treatment with prednisone and mesalazine (5-ASA) was initiated. Steroids were tapered over three weeks to 5 mg daily. 5-ASA was continued until week 24.

Three months later (receiving 5-ASA 2 g daily) there was complete clinical and endoscopic remission. Histology showed a mild residual increase in mononuclear inflammatory cells. PCR revealed a virological relapse of HCV (high viraemia >6×10¹⁰ IU/ml) and an unchanged twofold elevation in ALT and AST.

We suspect that the ulcerative colitis-like severe pancolitis in this patient with no
history of IBD was probably an adverse effect of the antiviral treatment with interferon-ribavirin rather than a concomitant disease. Similar observations have been made by others.\textsuperscript{8,9} To our knowledge, the present case is the fourth reported in the literature. Interferon has immune stimulating properties\textsuperscript{10} and may trigger autoimmune diseases and transplant rejections. Hence, in light of this, the report on interferon treatment in active ulcerative colitis (Gut 2003; 52: 1728–33) seems interesting and warrants further research.

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

References


Author’s reply

As interferon alpha (IFN alpha) suppresses the ontogenic proinflammatory cytokines and induces various anti-inflammatory cytokines, it may show efficacy in chronic inflammatory disorders of the gut. In Crohn’s disease, lamina propria cells manifest increased secretion of IFN-γ whereas in ulcerative colitis lamina propria cells and natural killer T cells demonstrate increased secretion of IFN-α in ulcerative colitis. J Clin Invest 2004; 113: 1490–7.


References


CD14 C-260 T—TLR4 896 A—G

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</tr>
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<td>1 (4)</td>
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*TLR4/G was more frequent in CD patients compared with HC (19% vs 10%; p = 0.0489; odds ratio (OR) 2.076 (95% confidence interval (CI) 1.041–4.142)).

**TLR4 was significantly associated with colonic localisation compared with non-colonic localisation (43% vs 46%; p = 0.0017; OR 5.455 (95% CI 1.931–15.410)).

References


Reoperative chemoradiotherapy for oesophageal cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis

Just as the weakest link in a chain determines how much weight the chain will hold, the weakest link in the data used by Fiorica et al determine how much weight we as readers should give to their findings and conclusions regarding neoadjuvant chemoradiotherapy for oesophageal adenocarcinoma (Ann 2004; 33: 925–30). Clearly, the weakest link in their data is the material by Walsh et al, and prior to placing any confidence in the conclusions by Fiorica et al, a careful assessment of the reliability of the Walsh data is imperative. Well known criticisms of the Walsh trial include the lack of routine staging with computed tomography scanning that led to five patients undergoing surgery alone for stage 4 disease, the exclusion of a number of patients in the neoadjuvant arm for “protocol violations” when in fact several had evidence of progressive disease and should have been considered treatment failures, and the lack of a uniform surgical technique that led to five different types of operations performed and what are arguably the worst surgical results for oesophageal adenocarcinoma reported in the literature. However, these criticisms are overshadowed by a greater problem in the Walsh trial related to internal inconsistencies in the survival data. Careful review of the Walsh manuscript reveals that the survival data in the text of the report does not match the data in the Kaplan-Meier survival curves, but only the discrepancy is only for the neoadjuvant arm. In all cases the survival data for the surgery alone arm matches up precisely. For example, in the text of the manuscript, survival by intention to treat at three years in the neoadjuvant arm is reported as 32%, yet on the Kaplan-Meier graph survival by intention to treat in the neoadjuvant arm is approximately 48%. Similar discrepancies occur at essentially every data point for both the intention to treat and the treatment actually received graphs, but only for the neoadjuvant arm, with survival on the Kaplan-Meier graph matching up precisely in the data in the text. Importantly, the statistics for survival are calculated from the Kaplan-Meier curves, raising concern that the difference in survival between groups is in fact not significant. This alarming discrepancy has never been adequately addressed despite a letter to the New England Journal of Medicine and a subsequent reply by Dr Walsh.
The response by Walsh was that the graphs were mislabelled, but even with a different label the data points continue to be inconclusive.

In light of this, I would like to know how Fiorica et al handled the data from the Walsh trial. Did they use data from the Kaplan-Meier survival curves or from the text and tables in the manuscript? Were they aware of the discrepancy and if so why did they not comment on it in their manuscript and specify how they dealt with it in their meta-analysis? In light of these concerns, as well as other issues regarding this trial, is it appropriate to even include it in a meta-analysis unless the raw data are independently reviewed and the statistics validated? This is an especially important issue as the Walsh study is the only trial that included just patients with adenocarcinoma, and as stated in the manuscript by Fiorica et al, robust analysis showed that exclusion of the Walsh trial would lead to loss of statistical significance for overall mortality (Jut 2004;93:923–30). This would leave us where we started, lacking any significant evidence that neoadjuvant therapy improves survival for patients with oesophageal adenocarcinoma.

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

References


Systemic lidocaine and mexiletine for the treatment of a patient with total ulcerative colitis

In basic research, neural modulation in ulcerative colitis has been shown.1 In clinical settings, local anesthetics such as lidocaine and ropivacaine were used, administered per rectum, for the treatment of distal ulcerative colitis with a response rate of 83% after long treatment periods (6–34 weeks) for proctosigmoiditis (n = 49).2 We report a patient with total ulcerative colitis that was ameliorated by continuous intravenous administration of lidocaine followed by oral administration of mexiletine (a congener of lidocaine). A 24 year old man suffering from exacerbation of ulcerative colitis was admitted to our hospital. Total ulcerative colitis had been initially diagnosed one year previously. Disease extent was re-examined by barium study to reveal a total type of colitis. Conventional medical treatments, including systemic corticosteroids (prednisolone), and steroid pulse therapy, 5-aminosalicylate, and leukocyteapheresis were not effective. Abdominal pain with bleeding per rectum was very severe at night. We administered continuous systemic lidocaine (1 mg/min on the first day and 1.3 mg/min on subsequent days) only at night, resulting in complete disappearance of abdominal pain and bloody diarrhea on the first day of treatment. This therapy was given for one week followed by oral mexiletine (300 mg/day on the first two days and 200 mg/day thereafter) administration. Prednisolone was tapered without exacerbation of colitis during this treatment, and the patient left our hospital.

Clinical reports by Kemler and colleagues,1 who reported on a patient with ulcerative colitis exacerbated by spinal cord stimulation, and by Peck and Wood,2 who obtained complete remission of a patient with ulcerative colitis after spinal cord injury, support the involvement of neural control in ulcerative colitis. Systemic lidocaine, which has been shown to suppress only spontaneous ectopic discharges without blocking nerve conduction,3 and mexiletine may modulate central and/or peripheral nerve function. Thus, in this case, the effectiveness of these drugs could be attributed to modulation of nerve function. Björck4 et al found that when using a 2% gel (400 mg lidocaine), maximum plasma levels were 0.5–1.9 mg/l in patients with proctitis two hours after application of the gel.5 In experimental models, plasma concentrations of 1.2–2.1 mg/l of lidocaine has been shown to be effective for neuro-pathic pain.6 Therefore, it is possible that in ulcerative colitis, lidocaine administered per rectum could exert its pharmacological effects after being absorbed into blood and has an effect on central and/or peripheral nerves. Another possibility is that direct anti-inflammatory effects of these drugs on immune cells.7 However, it is not known whether systemic administration of lidocaine can achieve adequate concentrations in colonic tissue to have a direct anti-inflammatory effect on immune cells.8 A prominent feature of this case was the close association between pain and other symptoms such as bloody diarrhea. Systemic lidocaine caused prompt symptomatic relief followed by amelioration of ulcerative colitis which was assessed by sigmoidoscopy and blood inflammatory parameters (data not shown), suggesting that pain or pain inducing substances could be a cause of exacerbation of ulcerative colitis as well as a result of the disease. Lidocaine and mexiletine therapy could be useful for the treatment of the subgroup of patients with ulcerative colitis that are refractory to conventional medical treatments. While we do not know how to select responders to this treatment, pain could be one of the indicators.

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doi: 10.1136/gut.2004.055525
Conflict of interest: None declared.

References


New treatment for bile salt malabsorption

Currently available binding resins used for symptomatic bile salt malabsorption are generally poorly tolerated because of unpalatability and associated gastrointestinal side effects. We suggest that there has now been a right choice of alternative, colestevam hydrochloride (WelChol, Sankyo Pharmaceuticals Inc., Japan).

A 30 year old man presented with steatorrhea, progressive weight loss, marked abdominal bloating, and lethargy after a right hemicolectomy following a road traffic accident in 1966. Physical examination, relevant blood tests, barium follow through, colonoscopy, and microscopic examination of colonic biopsies were normal. A trial of cholestyramine in preference to a SeCHAT scan caused cessation of diarrhoea on one sachet per day. However, his abdominal bloating continued unabated and he found the treatment unpalatable. Cholestyramine was therefore changed to colestevam 2.5 g/3.75 g on alternate days. This was well tolerated, with complete cessation of his steatorrhoea and lethargy, and no side effects. In addition, he rapidly gained weight.

A further four patients with markedly symptomatic bile salt malabsorption resistant to anti diarrhoeal agents and intolerance of cholestyramine were subsequently commenced on colestevam (table 1). In all of these cases colestevam was well tolerated with no side effects.

Colestevam is a non-absorbed water insoluble polymer which sequesters bile.6 It has been approved for usage by the US FDA, and has been received as a valuable alternative for lowering cholesterol.7 Colestevam has high affinity for dihydroxy and trihydroxy bile acids in the intestine which causes increased faecal bile acid secretion, reducing the enterohpatic circulation of bile acids.8 This allows 7-hydroxylation, the rate limiting enzyme in bile acid synthesis, to increase the conversion of hepatic cholesterol to bile acids.9 It has not yet been approved for use in the UK. One abstract suggests that colestevam may be beneficial for patients with diarrhoea who have undergone small bowel resection for Crohn’s disease.10 There is published data to support its role in bile salt induced diarrhoea. Colestevam is reported to be 4–6 times as potent as traditional bile salt sequestrants, possibly due to its greater binding affinity for glycocholic acid. It is administered in tablet form, and in one study the rate of compliance with colestevam was 93%.11 The unique hydrogel polymeric
structure enables greater tolerability with less potential drug interactions than with resins.7

Reported adverse events from the largest clinical trial to date include flatulence, dyspepsia, and diarrhoea although the incidence of adverse events does differ significantly from that observed with placebo, and is lower than with cholestyramine. It is rarely associated with constipation, unlike cholestyramine.6 Colesevelam is non-absorbed and is excreted entirely via the gastrointestinal tract, preventing systemic side effects.6 Furthermore, there is little evidence for clinically significant interactions involving colesevelam.7 Pharmacokinetic studies with colesevelam have not shown clinically significant effects of absorption of six other coadministered drugs.8

There is a theoretical risk of fat soluble vitamin deficiency following such efficient bile acid sequestration. None of our patients developed any significant change in fasting triglycerides or fat soluble vitamin levels to develop any significant change in vitamin deficiency following such efficient bile acid sequestration. None of our patients obtained from IDIS Ltd.

### Table 1

Characteristics of four patients with markedly symptomatic bile salt malabsorption resistant to antidiarrhoeal agents and intolerant of cholestyramine given colesevelam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (y)</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Reason for bile salt malabsorption</th>
<th>Outcome with cholestyramine</th>
<th>Outcome with colesevelam</th>
<th>Duration of colesevelam treatment (months)</th>
<th>Current dose of colesevelam</th>
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<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Idiopathic</td>
<td>Diarrhoea improved but not tolerated because it induced severe dyspepsia</td>
<td>Diarrhoea resolved, no side effects</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3.75 g/day</td>
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<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Right hemicolectomy</td>
<td>Diarrhoea improved but not tolerated due to unpalatability</td>
<td>Diarrhoea resolved, no side effects</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.75 g/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Radiation enteritis and right hemicolectomy Radiation enteritis</td>
<td>Diarrhoea improved although suffered intractable vomiting</td>
<td>Diarrhoea resolved, no side effects</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.5 g/day</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Radiation enteritis</td>
<td>Diarrhoea improved although suffered intractable nausea</td>
<td>Diarrhoea resolved, no side effects</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.25 g/day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


6th International Symposium on Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders

This symposium is co-sponsored by the Office of Continuing Medical Education, University of Wisconsin Medical School, and the International Foundation for Functional Gastrointestinal Disorders (IFFGD). It will take place on 7–10 April 2005 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, at The Pfister Hotel, 424 E. Wisconsin Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 53202 (tel: +1 414 273 8222; toll free tel: +1 800 538 8222; fax: +1 414 273 5025; email: info@thepfisterhotel.com; web: http://www.iffgd.org/symposium2005.html).

The national register of hepatitis C infections with a known date of acquisition

A new call for study proposals.

In 1998, a national register of hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections with a known date of acquisition was established. The register was set up to help inform the natural history of HCV related disease in the UK and now contains anonymous data for one of the largest cohorts of individuals with known date HCV infections, with over 1120 registered patients. The majority of infections in the register are those that were acquired following transfusion of HCV infected blood that was issued before the introduction of routine screening of the blood supply for HCV, but other routes of acquisition are represented.

In order to get maximum benefit from this national resource, the register steering group would like to invite clinical and epidemiological researchers to submit proposals to access data held in the register. It is envisaged that a variety of studies might benefit from linkage with access to the register, and proposals from all specialties and institutions are welcomed. Such studies are urgently needed to help determine the current and future burden of HCV related disease on healthcare services, and to assess the impact of currently available treatments as well as those that may become available in the future.

Any researchers interested in applying for access to information held within the national register should contact Dr Helen Harris (Register Co-ordinator) or Ms Shirley Cole (Research Assistant), Immunisation Department, CDSC, Centre for Infections, Health Protection Agency, 61 Colindale Avenue, London NW9 6EQ, UK (tel: +44 (0)20 8200 6868 ext. 7676 (Wednesday to Friday) or ext. 7906 (Monday to Friday); fax: +44 (0)20 8200 7868; email: helen.harris@hpa.org.uk or shirley.cole@hpa.org.uk).

No data will be released that could identify individual patients directly or via linkage to other data. Any study proposals should then be submitted to the register co-ordinator for consideration by the steering group by Thursday 31 March 2005 (deadline).


In the paper by Sheu et al in the July 2003 issue of Gut (B-S Sheu, S-M Sheu, H-B Yang, A-H Huang, and J-J Wu. Host gastric Lewis babA2 genotypes and phenotypes of Helicobacter pylori in h2al2 genopositive infection. Gut 2003;52:927–932), the B and C slides of figure 1 have been transposed and the arrow on D should be labelled Le- not Le+.
Reoperative chemoradiotherapy for oesophageal cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis
S R DeMeester

Gut 2005 54: 440-441
doi: 10.1136/gut.2004.053660

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