Immunofluorescence studies of the distribution of gastrin cells in different clinical states

A. G. E. PEARSE AND G. BUSSOLATI
Royal Postgraduate Medical School, Hammersmith Hospital, London

SUMMARY Examination of human gastric biopsies by an indirect immunofluorescence technique using antihuman gastrin confirms the variability in distribution and number of gastrin-secreting (G) cells (Solcia, Vassallo, and Capella, 1969) observed by morphological, cytochemical, and electron microscopical studies. In cases with presumed secondary hypersecretion a profound degree of G-cell hyperplasia is observed. Immunofluorescence with antigastrin can provide valuable information on the state of the G cells in different physiological states, particularly if used in conjunction with other cytochemical techniques.

An immunofluorescence technique was first used successfully by McGuigan (1968) to demonstrate gastrin in the porcine and human antrum. The fluorescent cells were identified as similar to those of certain classes of enterochromaffin cells but they could not be identified as argentaffin or argyrophil. In the case of the porcine antrum the cells fluorescing after the application of antigastrin sera were identified by Bussolati and Pearse (1970) as the argyrophil G cells described by Solcia et al (1969). This paper describes the application of an indirect immunofluorescence technique to the study of the distribution of G cells in the human pyloric antrum in different clinical states.

Materials and Methods

Biopsies of human antral mucosa were removed from the capsule and fixed immediately in cold (4°C) 4% formaldehyde prepared from paraformaldehyde according to the procedure of Graham and Karnovsky (1966). Subsequently they were washed for two to 24 hours in 30% sucrose in buffered saline (pH 7.4), dehydrated in alcohol, cleared in xylene, and embedded in paraffin wax. Sections were cut at 5 μm and brought down to buffered saline through xylene and graded alcohols. They were processed by an indirect immunofluorescence technique. The antigastrin serum (a gift from Professor K. W. Rees, University College Hospital, London) was prepared by immunizing rabbits with synthetic human gastrin bound to bovine serum albumin by the procedure used by McGuigan (1968). The presence of antigastrin antibodies was assessed by radioimmunoassay.

The indirect immunofluorescence procedure was carried out with sections first treated either with unlabelled antigastrin serum, or unlabelled antigastrin serum absorbed with bovine serum albumin to remove antibovine serum albumin antibodies, or normal rabbit serum.

Subsequently all sections were treated with goat antirabbit γ-globulin labelled with fluorescein isothiocyanate and passed through DEAE-cellulose columns (Wood, Thompson, and Goldstein, 1965). The fractions obtained by eluting with 0.1 and 0.05M phosphate buffer were concentrated before use.

Results

Control sections, treated with normal rabbit
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Fig. 1. Normal human stomach, female 26 years, pyloric region. Radiological and gastrin secretion tests normal. G cells are present in moderate numbers in the pyloric glands, mainly in the mid portion (× 87).

Fig. 2. Human stomach, pyloric region, from a case of acromegaly with hypersecretion (Kay test, 15 m-equiv/hour; post-histamine, 24 m-equiv/hour). The mid portions of the gastric glands show hyperplasia of the G cells (× 87).

Fig. 3. Normal pyloric antrum. Higher magnification of cells from the same antrum as in Figure 1. Shows individual G cells in mid-zone glands (× 420).

Fig. 4. Human pyloric antrum, as in Fig. 2 (hypersecretion). Very many more G cells are present and the degree of fluorescence shown by the individual cells is raised by comparison with the control case shown in Fig. 3 (× 420).

All photomicrographs are of cold formaldehyde-fixed, 5μm, cryostat sections.
hyperplasia has been observed in several locations and may be associated with the stimulation of gastric secretion. The results obtained by Rubin (1969) are probably significant. He describes a striking hyperplasia of endocrine-like cells (almost certainly G cells) in suction biopsies of atrophic gastric mucosa.

The results presented here are essentially preliminary. We have been unable to examine any case of pernicious anemia but the results obtained by Rubin (1969) are probably significant. He describes a striking hyperplasia of endocrine-like cells (almost certainly G cells) in suction biopsies of atrophic gastric mucosa.

We conclude that immunofluorescence studies of gastrin levels in human gastric biopsies can yield valuable information and we consider that much new information can be derived from these, particularly if they are combined with studies using staining and other cytochemical techniques in addition to immunofluorescence.

Addendum

Five cases of pernicious anemia have now been examined by Polak, Coulling, and Pearse. Confirmation of G-cell hyperplasia has been obtained in the fundic mucosa. The majority of cells have a low granule content and low immunofluorescence.

References


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