LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Oral submucous fibrosis—a chronic disseminated intravascular coagulation syndrome with local coagulopathy

EDITOR,—We have read the leading article in Gut with great interest. (Gut 1992; 33: 4–6).

We were, however, disappointed as the work on oral submucous fibrosis published in Indian journals 1 and the American Journal of Clinical Pathology 2 has not been covered by the authors. After working for about 15 years on oral submucous fibrosis, we cannot agree with the views expressed.

According to Jayanthi et al, oral submucous fibrosis has been attributed to local irritation caused by tobacco and chillies used in cooking and that the progression of the disease can be halted by stopping tobacco, pan, etc but it does not seem to be that simple or straightforward.

We have seen young female patients who were not exposed to such irritants and they still developed the disease.

We have seen that oral submucous fibrosis is a chronic disseminated intravascular coagulation syndrome but it is well compensated for in most patients. We have shown that there is a thrombin like substance identified as fibrin producing factor in the saliva of patients suffering from oral submucous fibrosis. 1 This is in contrast with the findings in normal saliva. In normal saliva fibrinolytic substances have been shown, however, 2–4 have found considerable amounts of proactivator and plaminogen in mixed, parotid, and submaxillary sublingual saliva. Several centres in India have confirmed the presence of fibrin producing factor in oral submucous fibrosis (personal communication).

In 1984, using a haemagglutination inhibition technique (Wellcome Kit HA:14) we showed that fibrinogen/fibrin degradation products—which we prefer to call molecules immunologically similar to fibrinogen (MISFI)—were detected both in the plasma and sera of the patients with oral submucous fibrosis. 1 These MISFI were like fibrin monomers, because para-coagulation tests were positive and cryoprecipitation was present.

In addition to the discovery of MISFI we have done global or first line clotting time tests in oral submucous fibrosis (unpublished data). These screening tests—activated partial thromboplastin time, prothrombin time, and thrombin time—yield interesting information. The clotting times of oral submucous fibrosis are either prolonged or normal or even shortened.

When working on oral submucous fibrosis plasma, it is important to appreciate that there is a strong tendency for the formation of cryofibrinogen so that tests should be performed on fresh plasma and sera. When the plasma is stored at −20°C cryofibrinogen can develop in a matter of two to six hours.

We find cryofibrinogen in almost all patients with oral submucous fibrosis. The presence of cryofibrinogen suggests that a small quantity of thrombin like material is being added to the circulating plasma. 1 Our data suggest that this thrombin like procoagulant is present in the saliva of patients with oral submucous fibrosis. Furthermore, we are tempted to suggest that the varying clotting times, the presence of MISFI (or fibrinogen/fibrin degradation products) and cryofibrinogen should point to hypercoagulation. According to Wintrobe 1 hypercoagulation and chronic disseminated intravascular coagulation are superficially different but basically the same phenomena and disseminated intravascular coagulation is virtually always associated with fibrinolysis.

Oral submucous fibrosis seems to have a genetic basis. It is suggested that in oral submucous fibrosis the local fibrinolytic mechanism in the oral cavity is defective and cannot match or matches imperfectly with the hypercoagulation produced by the fibrin producing factor.

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Concentrations of 5-ASA and AC-5-ASA in human ileocolonic biopsy homogenates

EDITOR,—I read with interest the paper by (Gut 1992; 33: 1338–42) Vos et al. This is a new approach to the study 5-ASA compounds in humans but further work is necessary to correlate these concentrations with clinical benefit in inflammatory bowel diseases.

Firstly, I would like to comment about the experimental protocol. In their study, Vos et al are using their patients a laxative to colonic lavage, and to obtain similar conditions to those found in ulcerative colitis. It has been shown previously, however, by Rao et al, from Sheffield that total colonic transit time is not decreased in patients with acute ulcerative colitis. Segmental distribution of markers assessed by an abdominal x ray done 48 hours after the ingestion of radiopaque markers showed that patients with acute ulcerative colitis had proximal colonic stasis whereas rectosigmoid transit in a clinical rapid. It is possible that the ingestion of laxatives three days before the study will decrease the time for the colonic bacteria to split the azo bond of Dipentum and Salazopyrin. The very low mucosal concentrations of 5-ASA seen in this study, could partly be because of the decreased colonic transit time.

Secondly, there is only some information in this paper about the effect of the use of colonic lavage on mucosal concentrations of the 5-ASA and AC-5-ASA in human rectosigmoid biopsy homogenates after ingestion of Salazopyrin, Dipentum, and Claversal 250. The data presented on table V show that colonic lavage is associated with an important decrease of 5-ASA concentration for Dipentum and Asacol 250 but not for Salazopyrin and we have no information for Asacol 500 and Claversal, which gave the highest concentration. Therefore, we believe that in vivo dialysis of faeces is perhaps a more physiological way to measure concentrations of 5-ASA and AC-5-ASA after oral 5-ASA preparations as proposed Laurissen et al. 2

Thirdly, in their study, Vos et al measure the concentration of 5-ASA in human ileocolonic biopsy homogenates that are considered the active drug of all these compounds. This is true for coated 5-ASA compounds and Dipentum but it is not true for Salazopyrin, which is not only a produrg but also has direct effect on the inflammatory process seen in ulcerative colitis. 1 Therefore the colonic mucosal concentration of 5-ASA is not sufficient to assess the efficacy of this drug in inflammatory bowel disease.

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