POSTSCRIPT

LETTERS

Hypomagnesaemia due to malabsorption is not always responsive to oral magnesium oxide supplementation alone

We read with interest the Gut File report by Dr Ross and colleagues of hypomagnesaemia due to malabsorption, eventually responding to oral magnesium oxide supplementation (Gut 2001;48:857–8). Our experience however has been different. For the past seven years we have managed a 65 year old woman with short bowel syndrome (right hemicolectomy for Duke’s C colorectal carcinoma and thereafter a terminal ileal resection for abscess formation).

High ileostomy output was initially difficult to manage (after excluding infection, sequestering gut hormone tumours by normal hormonal levels, and despite dietary and pharmacological modifications). Clinical signs of hypomagnesaemia and hypocalcaemia ensued. An initial trial with magnesium glycerophosphate (September 1992 to December 1993) was insufficient to sustain her serum magnesium levels requiring frequent “top ups” of intravenous magnesium.1 In December 1993, she was switched to magnesium oxide supplementation but despite this the frequency of intravenous magnesium “top ups” were not reduced. Compliance was not deemed to be an issue with our patient.

Since then we have managed this woman while still taking magnesium oxide supplements with almost 3–6 monthly (fig 1) intravenous magnesium replacement through a peripheral line and have avoided insertion of a Hickman line and all its associated complications.2 While we agree that a trial of magnesium oxide is prudent and until the pharmacokinetics are better understood, this preparation may not be sufficient, especially in patients with extensive resection of the small bowel, as demonstrated in our patient.

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References

Regulation of gastric function by gastrin releasing peptide

Hildebrand et al reported data suggesting that gastrin releasing peptide (GRP) may be a physiological regulator of pre- and postprandial gastric acid secretion (Gut 2001;49:23–8). Interestingly, these effects were independent of gastrin and the authors appropriately questioned the physiological role of gastrin in regulating gastric secretion. Several aspects of the authors’ conclusions deserve further clarification and discussion.

The authors concluded that alteration of somatostatin secretion is unlikely to explain the acid inhibitory action of BIM26226 because the GRP antagonist did not alter somatostatin mRNA levels. They also argued that the lack of change of gastrin mRNA supported the physiological data showing no alteration in gastric secretion.

In short term experiments such as these, it is incorrect to assume mRNA levels reflect peptide secretion rates. In longer term studies this may be true, but it is clear that neuropeptide translation, synthesis, and secretion are all regulated independently and changes may not occur in parallel.3,4 Indeed, previous studies with GRP infusion in humans have shown that although secretion of gastrin peptide was enhanced, gastrin mRNA levels were actually decreased.5 Thus it would be unwise to exclude the possibility of any peptide having a role in this dynamic system on the basis of unchanged mRNA levels.

The authors also state that muscarinic receptor activation inhibits somatostatin secretion from D cells. This is correct for fundic but incorrect for antral D cells. Muscarinic activation actually stimulates somatostatin release from antral D cells.6 This would be more compatible with the mechanisms suggested by the authors: GRP enhanced neuronal acetylcholine release and this reduced fundic somatostatin mediated inhibition of histamine and acid secretion; in the antrum, stimulation of somatostatin release would then impair the gastrin response and could contribute to the lack of gastrin response seen in the current experiments.

The authors felt that previous in vitro studies of G cells were difficult to assess but they appear to have overlooked detailed studies of cultured human G cells. Squires et al demonstrated two receptors of the GRP family in antral tissue, namely GRPR (BB1) and BRS-3 (BB3).7 BRS-3 is an orphan receptor that does not functionally respond to bombesin/GRP except at very high concentrations.8 Single cell microfluorometry clearly showed antral G cells responding to bombesin with an increase in intracellular calcium, thus suggesting that human antral G cells express physiologically functional GRP receptors. In the light of these data, the results of Hildebrand et al are very interesting and the current study should stimulate interest in the ever evolving understanding of gastric secretory function. Further studies with BIM26226 under different conditions, to more fully describe the pathophysiological role of GRP, are awaited with interest.

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References
1 Tolon RM, Sanchez-Franco F, delos-Frailles MT, et al. Effect of potassium induced depolarization on somatostatin gene

Figure 1 Serum magnesium levels in our patient over the course of treatment with magnesium oxide supplements and intravenous magnesium replacement.

Authors’ reply

We appreciate Dr Beales’ interest in our study describing the effects of gastrin releasing peptide (GRP) and its antagonist BIM26226 on gastric acid secretion in healthy male subjects. One can only speculate on the mechanisms of GRP stimulated acid secretion. The points raised by Dr Beales are interesting and valid. However, a word of caution is necessary for some of his conclusions: data from rats and some of his conclusions: data from rats and animals and suggest species differences. Thus the molecular mechanism of GRP stimulated acid secretion has not directly been substantiated in humans. This is not likely to be a reflection of the fact that this is predominantly a disease of postmenopausal women who show a generalised increased prevalence of osteoporosis. The use of Z scores implicitly controls our data for age and sex norms. We agree with Professor Floreani that redressing the question of osteoporosis prevalence in other chronic liver diseases (both cholestatic and non-cholestatic) would be of interest but we feel that this is not relevant to the current study. Given the very real problems experienced by some PBC patients as a result of osteoporotic fracture (particularly in the early post-transplant period), further study of the aetiology is appropriate (although the retrospective nature of the current study makes the suggested logistic regression analysis inappropriate). The message that we (and more recently others) have been communicating is that the search for risk factors for osteoporosis should not be focused on liver disease specific factors but could more usefully be directed at more generalised population risk factors.

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Osteoporosis is not a specific complication of primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC)

Newton et al (Gut 2001;49:282–7) described a retrospective study on bone mineral density (BMD) in a large cohort of patients with primary biliary cirrhosis (PBC). The authors concluded that osteoporosis is not a specific complication of PBC, but certain weaknesses in the study design do not support this conclusion.

(A) The authors did not include age and sex matched controls from the general population, or control groups with different types of liver disease.

(B) A proper methodological design comparing osteoporosis in PBC and in a normal population should calculate the standardised incidence ratio of osteoporosis for the two cohorts by comparing the observed incidence versus the expected incidence. The calculation should include 95% confidence intervals accounting for exact Poisson limits.

(C) A logistic regression analysis including risk factors for osteoporosis (that is, age, menopausal status, smoking habits, alcohol consumption, etc) should have been performed.

The major drawback however is the lack of control populations with different types of liver disease. New data are emerging in the literature concerning this field. In particular, several recent studies (including one of our own) have demonstrated that PBC in itself does not exert a negative influence on BMD. Thus we agree with Newton et al that osteoporosis in PBC should be revisited.

In our study we demonstrated that although 85/272 (31%) patients had osteoporosis, as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) at the time of their first DEXA scan, mean Z score at the neck of femur was –0.1 and at the lumbar spine 0.1. As Z scores represent bone mineral density compared with an age and sex matched population, this suggests that the prevalence of osteoporosis seen in PBC is a reflection of the fact that this is predominantly a disease of postmenopausal women who show an increased prevalence of osteoporosis. The use of Z scores implicitly controls our data for age and sex norms. We agree with Professor Floreani that redressing the question of osteoporosis prevalence in other chronic liver diseases (both cholestatic and non-cholestatic) would be of interest but we feel that this is not relevant to the current study.
Expression of isoforms of nitric oxide synthase in collagenous colitis

We read with interest the study by Perner et al (Gut 2001;49:387–94) investigating expression of various isoforms of nitric oxide synthase (iNOS, eNOS, and nNOS) in non-inflamed colon, collagenous colitis, and ulcerative colitis. Inducible NOS (iNOS) was identified by immunohistochemical analysis in the epithelium of patients with non-inflamed colon. The authors concluded that this might be a result of bowel preparation with bisacodyl.

Increased synthesis of nitric oxide has been detected by a number of different methods in patients with non-inflammatory bowel disease. The authors concluded that this might be a result of physiological expression of iNOS rather than a secondary phenomenon as a result of physiological expression of iNOS rather than a secondary phenomenon as a result of bowel preparation per se or the effect of secretagogue laxative bisacodyl.

For the reasons given above, we also agree that iNOS expression may be important in maintaining the epithelial barrier and may represent a link between dietary or other luminal factors and the development of colorectal cancer, as hypothesised by Cameron et al, although high iNOS expression in collagenous colitis is not associated with an increased risk of malignancy.

CORRECTION

The correct result should be a reversal of these values, with sensitivity being 71.4% and specificity being 85.7%. The authors apologise for the error.

NOTICES

Broad Medical Research Program—Inflammatory Bowel Disease Grants

Funds for inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) research are available immediately from the Broad Medical Research Program of The Eli and Edythe L. Broad Foundation for innovative projects regarding etiology, therapy, or prevention. Grants totalling approximately US$100,000 per year are available for basic or clinical projects. Larger requests may be considered. Initial letter of interest (no submission deadline), simple application, rapid (60 day) peer review, and funding. Criteria for funding includes new ideas or directions, scientific excellence, and originality. Early exploratory projects, scientists not currently working in IBD, and/or interdisciplinary efforts are encouraged. Further information: Marcianna Poland, Research Administrator, Broad Medical Research Program, 10900 Wilshire Blvd., 12th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90024-6532, USA; Tel: +1 310 954 5091; email: info@broadmedical.org; website: www.broadmedical.org.

Gastroenterology and Endotherapy European Workshop: XXth Anniversary

This course will be held on 17–19 June 2002 in Brussels, Belgium. Further information: Nancy Beaufrez, Gastroenterology Department, Erasme Hospital, Route de Lennik 806, B-1070 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: +32 (0)2 555 49 00; fax: +32 (0)2 555 4901; email: beaufrez@ulb.ac.be

EASL Monothematic Conference on Vascular Function in Liver Disease

This conference will take place on 30 June to 2 July 2002 in London, UK. Further information: Professor Jordi Bruix, EASL Liaison Bureau, c/o Renes International, 17 rue du Caire, 1205 Geneva, Switzerland. Tel: +41 22 540 53 50; email: info@easli.org; website: www.easli.org.
Deadline for abstract submission 15 May 2002. Further information: kmoore@rfc.ucl.ac.uk; tel: +44 (0)207 433 2876.

5th International Workshop on Pathogenesis and Host Response in Helicobacter Infections
This will be held on 4–7 July 2002 in Helsingør, Denmark. Further information: Dr Tina Ken Hansen, Department of Cardiology-Endocrinology E, Frederiksberg Hospital, Ndr. Fasanvej, DK-2000 Frederiksberg, Denmark. Fax: +45 3545 7708; email: helpatim@biobase.dk

ESPEN 2002
The European Society for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition will be hosting its annual meeting on 31 August to 4 September 2002 in Glasgow, UK. The organisers anticipate 300 delegates, principally from Europe but also from the USA and the Far East. Further information: Mrs Pat Howard, Honorary Secretary, BAPEN, Head of Nutrition and Dietetic Services, Bristol Royal Infirmary, Bristol BS2 8HW, Tel: +44 (0)117 928 2049; Fax +44 (0)117 928 3005; email: pat.howard@ubht.swest.nhs.uk

Postgraduate Gastroenterology
This course will be held on 15–18 September 2002 in Oxford, UK. The course has been designed for consultants and registrars, including those who do not specialise in gastroenterology. Topics will include: Barrett’s Oesophagus; The Case for Endoscopic Surveillance Debate; Liver Disease; Bacteria and the Gut; IBD Therapeutics, Gastrointestinal Bleeding, Endoscopic Training. Further information: Professor Derek P Jewell, University of Oxford, Nuffield Department of Medicine, Gastroenterology Unit, Gibson Laboratories, 2nd Floor, Radcliffe Infirmary, Block 21, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HE. Tel: +44 (0)1865 224829; fax: +44 (0)1865 790792; email: derek.jewell@ndm.ox.ac.uk; website: www.medicine.ox.ac.uk/gastro

3rd World Chinese Congress of Digestology
This congress will take place on 23–25 September 2002 in Beijing, China. Further information: Lian-Sheng Ma, President of WCCD, PO Box 2345 Beijing 100230, China. Fax: +86 6589 1893; email: wcjd@public.bta.net.cn
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