LETTERS

Acute toxic gastric mucosal damage induced by Lugol's iodine spray during chromoendoscopy

Lugol's solution, named after the French Physician JGA Lugol (1786–1851), has a high affinity for glycogen in non-keratinised squamous epithelium. Since the 1960s when Lugol's iodine was first used to investigate mucosa, advances in the field of diagnostic endoscopy have resulted in its increasing use to detect early mucosal abnormalities and to target biopsies from unstained areas. We have been performing chromoendoscopy using Lugol's solution for the last 10 years, carrying out 10–15 procedures every year. Here we report the first case of an acute toxic reaction affecting the gastric mucosa.

At gastroscopy of a 67 year old woman with reflux symptoms, a small nodule was noted at the gastro-oesophageal junction together with reflux oesophagitis (LA grade B). Biopsies from the nodule raised the possibility of dysplasia within the squamous epithelium. One month later a repeat examination was performed to reassess the squamous epithelium and target biopsies using Lugol's chromoendoscopy; 10 ml of 5% Lugol's iodine was sprayed using an Olympus PL spraying catheter. Multiple biopsies were targeted to the unstained areas together with random biopsies from the distal oesophagus. At the end of the examination, the stomach was again entered to remove any stagnant iodine. The gastric mucosa underlying the pool of iodine was intensely oedematous and haemorrhagic (fig 1A, 1B) The patient did not complain of any symptoms either during or after the procedure. Gastric biopsies confirmed acute oedema of the lamina propria with loss of the superficial epithelium consistent with an acute toxic gastric mucosal injury induced by Lugol's iodine solution (fig 1C) The oesophageal biopsies showed no dysplasia.

During a follow up examination performed three months later to reassess the lower oesophagus, the gastric mucosa appeared endoscopically and histologically unremarkable.

Chromoendoscopy using Lugol's solution is not without hazards. Local irritation of the oesophageal mucosa may cause retrosternal pain. General allergic reactions include laryngospasm, bronchospasm, and even cardiac arrest. The concentration of the solution used in studies ranges from 0.5% to 5%, and higher concentrations (3–5%) may be associated with a higher risk of complications. A Japanese study reported that washing the mucosa with sodium thiosulphate may neutralise the iodine solution and reduce retrosternal discomfort. Only two cases of gastric mucosal erosions have been reported after the application of iodine.

In this case, the histological features of localised oedema and loss of superficial gastric epithelium in the absence of significant inflammatory cell infiltrate supported an acute toxic injury to the gastric mucosa. The toxic reaction was confined to the columnar epithelium in the greater curve of the stomach that was in direct contact with the pooled 5% Lugol's iodine while the squamous oesophageal mucosa remained unremarkable both endoscopically and histologically. Gastric columnar epithelium may be more susceptible to the toxic effect of Lugol's iodine and mucosal injury may go unrecognised unless the stomach is re-examined after application of the dye. To reduce the risks, we now use 10–20 ml of 1.5% Lugol's solution and routinely aspirate the gastric pool before assessing the oesophageal mucosa.

Previous studies have shown that Lugol's staining is useful in screening for early oesophageal cancer in high risk populations such as patients with previous or current non-oesophageal malignancy and those with a high alcohol intake. However, none of these studies commented on the adverse reactions to Lugol's staining during endoscopy. We suggest that the adverse reactions and safety profile of iodine staining need to be addressed, in particular before recommending its routine use for screening purposes. Also, where it has to be used, a lower concentration of 1.5% may be less toxic to the gastric mucosa and is thus recommended.

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

References

Figure 1  (A, B) Oedematous and haemorrhagic mucosa with loss of superficial gastric mucosal layer in the greater curve. (C) Mucosal oedema, loss of superficial gastric epithelium, and sparse inflammatory infiltrate in the lamina propria.
Erosions or not in GORD? The potential role of oesophageal cell proliferation

Gastro-oesophageal reflux is an almost universal daily occurrence, but only a small percentage of the population develops gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) and, among them, a small number develop erosive oesophagitis (ERD) or one of its complications. It is well accepted that the pathophysiology of GORD is related to failure of antireflux mechanisms but several phenomena are not fully explained on the basis of this sequence. There is no apparent relation between damage and the amount and quality of refluxate. It is not known why the same amount of refluxate determines GORD in one patient and not in another. It is also unclear whether there is a relation between these unexplained questions and the possible influence of proliferative responses of epithelial proliferating cells to damage. Hence we evaluated cell proliferation of the oesophageal epithelium using Ki67 immunostaining in normal subjects and in patients with GORD, with or without erosions.

Patients gave written informed consent to participate in the study which was approved by the ethics committee. The design was blinded for epithelial cell kinetic evaluation. Thirty-five subjects were enrolled: nine were healthy voluntary controls with normal pH testing and normal endoscopic, histological, and ultrastructural parameters. Of these 26 patients, 5 cm of the oesophagus from areas of macroscopically intact oesophageal mucosa at endoscopy (NERD) while 13 had a normal appearance oesophageal mucosa (NERD). Whiskers indicate lowest and highest values.

The presence of oesophagitis was graded macroscopically intact oesophageal mucosa. Biopsies were obtained within the lower 5 cm of the oesophagus from areas of erosions or not in GORD, with or without erosions. Patients gave written informed consent to testing and normal endoscopic, histological, and ultrastructural data of the studied population (normal healthy controls, and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease patients with erosive oesophagitis (ERD) and a normal appearing oesophageal mucosa (NERD). Whiskers indicate lowest and highest values.

References


Role of IL-10 promoter haplotypes in Helicobacter pylori associated gastric inflammation

We read with great interest the article by Rad et al (Gut 2004;53:1082–9) on the influence of cytokine gene polymorphisms on mucosal cytokine expression, gastric inflammation, and host specific colonisation in Helicobacter pylori infection. The authors reported an association of the contrainflammatory interleukin 10 (IL-10) promoter haplotype (GCC), with higher mucosal mRNA levels and colonisation with more virulent cagA+, vacA s1, and babA2+ strains in 207 patients with H pylori induced chronic gastritis. Rad et al identified pathogenicity genes of H pylori isolates by polymerase chain reaction based techniques from gastric biopsies. However, the human stomach is colonised by more than one strain of H pylori, which obscures the investigation of germline mutations and host specific colonisation. Moreover, within an apparently homogenous population, remarkable genetic differences exist among single colony isolates. The capacity of H pylori to lose and possibly acquire exogenous DNA is consistent with a model of continuous microevolution within its cognate host. Thus identification of bacterial virulence factors is directly dependent on localisation of the biopsies. This means that cagA+, vacA s1, and babA2 were not detected in biopsy specimens, co-localisation with strains harbouring these genes at another location cannot be excluded. Interestingly, the degree of inflammation and frequency of gastric atrophy and intestinal metaplasia was not different in patients carrying pro- or contrainflammatory haplotypes. The significance of genetic association studies is highly dependent on a well defined phenotype in contrast with the degree of granulocytic and lymphocytic infiltration in chronic gastritis, which may again vary regionally, the development of gastric ulcer is an unambiguous hallmark for the severity of H pylori induced mucosal damage.

We recruited 614 consecutive Caucasian patients from Northern Germany who underwent gastroscopy with confirmed H pylori infection by rapid urease test or histology. Endoscopic findings and results of histopathological examination of biopsies, classified according to the Sydney classification, were recorded. In total, 316 patients presented with chronic gastritis and served as controls and 128 patients suffered from gastric ulcer. DNA was extracted by standard techniques from 5 ml of EDTA blood. All patients were genotyped for IL-10 −1082, −819, and −592 by TaqMan technology. Samples were recoded and genotypes assigned without knowledge of clinical status. Single marker and haplotype analysis was conducted to assess associations with development of gastric ulcer.

There were no associations between any of the single nucleotide polymorphisms tested and H pylori related pathological findings (data not shown). The proinflammatory low secreting haplotype ATA did not confer a risk factor for the development of an ulcer and the contrainflammatory haplotype GCC did not protect patients from gastric ulcer (table 1). Our results are in agreement with the study of Hida et al who reported higher IL-10 mRNA expression in cagA+ H pylori gastritis, with no relation to endoscopic diagnosis. Therefore, we conclude that genetic variations in the IL-10 promoter may influence mucosal cytokine expression but pro- and contrainflammatory haplotypes do not influence the clinical course of gastric ulceration, at least in Northern Germany. Furthermore, we suggest that association studies of germline polymorphisms with the outcome of chronic H pylori infection should focus on clearly defined phenotypes such as ulcer disease, gastric carcinoma, or primary gastric B cell lymphoma.

Table 1 Haplotype analysis of the interleukin 10 (IL-10) promoter in 440 patients with chronic gastritis and gastric ulcer disease

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IL-10 promoter</th>
<th>Chronic gastritis (n = 316)</th>
<th>Gastric ulcer (n = 124)</th>
<th>p Value (z)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>−1082 −819 −592</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G C C</td>
<td>48.0%</td>
<td>48.3%</td>
<td>1.01 0.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A T A</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>1.03 0.862</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A C C</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>0.97 0.842</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

OR, odds ratio.

Gastric ulceration due to chronic mesenteric ischaemia treated by stenting of the inferior mesenteric artery

We report a case of gastric ulceration due to visceral ischaemia treated successfully by stenting of the inferior mesenteric artery (IMA) alone. Gastric ulceration has rarely been described as a result of visceral mesenteric ischaemia.[1–3] Four of the five cases described in these reports were treated surgically and one by angioplasty to the superior mesenteric artery (SMA). All were reported to have successful resolution of gastric ulcers. To our knowledge, there is no other case of successful stenting of the IMA alone, with resolution of gastric ischaemia described in the medical literature.

Our patient was a 50 year old woman presenting with abdominal pain, loss of appetite, vomiting, and weight loss. Pain was maximal in the epigastrium and precipitated by meals. Apart from being a smoker there was no other significant medical history. She was empirically started on omeprazole. Oesophagogastroduodenoscopy (OGD) revealed multiple serpiginous ulcers affecting the body of the stomach with extension to the cardia (fig 1D). Histology from the ulcers demonstrated ulceration with regenerative hyperplasia with no evidence of Helicobacter pylori infection. An abdominal computed tomography scan showed non-specific thickening of the pylorus and first part of the duodenum but was otherwise normal. A small bowel follow through revealed no abnormality. Fasting gut hormone levels, including gastrin level, after stopping omeprazole were normal and a vasculitis screen (including serum ANCA) was negative.

Her abdominal pain was controlled by morphine 120 mg/day. A repeat OGD 10 weeks after treatment with omeprazole 40 mg once daily showed continuing ulceration with no improvement since the previous examination. Further histology showed similar findings as before.

Abdominal angiography demonstrated complete occlusion of the SMA origin (fig 1B), and tight ostial stenoses of the IMA (fig 1A) and coeliac axis. The SMA branches filled sluggishly and were reconstructed almost exclusively via the left colic branch of the IMA.

Attempts to bypass the coeliac axis stenosis and proximal SMA occlusion were unsuccessful. We therefore felt that a single vessel enteric bypass was the best option to restore mesenteric perfusion. The SMA was exposed via a right posterolateral thoracotomy and an interposition jejunal graft was fashioned and anastomosed distally to the jejunal limb using a side-to-side fashion with a 7 cm long anastomosis (fig 1E). The IMA was then reconstituted via a straight anastomosis to the jejunal limb of the jejuno-ileal interposition bypass. The IMA was also anastomosed to the cecum (fig 1F). The patient made an uncomplicated recovery. The patient was readmitted 1 month later with ongoing epigastric pain. Repeat endoscopy showed complete resolution of her previous ulceration (fig 1G) and a new ulceration was noted involving the cardia (fig 1H). The endoscopist felt that the patient may have had a recurrent ulceration and was discharge on further treatment. She is now symptom free and has returned to work 2 months after her initial presentation.

References


unsuccessful. The IMA was catheterised; initial pressure measurements demonstrated a mean IMA pressure of 20 mm Hg (mean pressure gradient between the IMA and the aorta of 70 mm Hg) which persisted after angioplasty with a 5 mm balloon. A 5 mm diameter, 16 mm long balloon mounted stent was therefore placed across the ostial stenosis (fig 1C) resulting in marked improvement of the angiographic appearance and almost complete obliteration of the mean pressure gradient. The patient was commenced on aspirin and warfarin and an international normalised ratio of 2 was maintained. She was weaned off the opiate analgesia and was discharged on omeprazole, aspirin, warfarin, and amitriptyline.

Her symptoms resolved completely and amitriptyline and warfarin were discontinued three months later. A repeat OGD showed complete healing of the ulcers. She was continued on aspirin 150 mg and omeprazole 10 mg daily and advised to stop smoking, but unfortunately was not successful in doing so. She has been followed up for 18 months and has had no recurrence of her symptoms.

The interest in this case lies in the fact that only the IMA needed to be stented to achieve an appropriate vascular supply to the stomach, despite severe occlusions and reduced flow in the coeliac and mesenteric axes. This has not been described before, and demonstrates that minimally invasive radiological stenting of only one territory of the mesenteric axis, even the IMA alone, can provide enough blood flow to treat the complications of chronic mesenteric vascular disease. This case is a reminder that chronic mesenteric vascular disease should be considered as a result of new indications and use in cross sectional imaging.  

Diagnostic radiation exposure and cancer risk

Diagnostic and therapeutic radiological investigations are an essential part of the workup of patients with a number of clinical problems across a variety of medical specialties. Although new non-x-ray technologies have started to replace traditional investigations these have not lead to a reduction in radiation exposure. In contrast, based on global statistics and projections, radiation exposure of patients is increasing, in particular as a result of new indications and use in cross sectional imaging.  

In addition, multiple investigations of patients with chronic disease can lead to substantial individual radiation exposure as surgical practice increasingly relies on the use of cross sectional imaging to aid diagnosis and treatment.  

New imaging techniques, in particular computed tomography (CT) colonography, have become attractive alternatives to conventional colonoscopy.  

However, the necessity for both prone and supine imaging means that radiation exposure is double that of a conventional abdominal scan which can lead to a theoretical increase in the risk of exposure related cancer and death.  

The awareness of hospital doctors about radiation exposure and associated cancer risk is poor.  

From personal experience, many gastroenterologists involved in diagnostic and therapeutic procedures using ionising radiation do not routinely wear full protective clothing (0.35 mm lead equivalent aprons, thyroid shield, lead glasses) on a regular basis. This is also shown in a survey of endoscopic retrograde cholangiopancreatography (ERCP) practices by Campbell et al in which only 52% of respondents reported wearing a thyroid shield all of the time.  

An audit of radiation exposure to personnel performing ERCP found that both patients and staff are exposed to significant radiation exposure. This was equivalent to an estimated additional lifetime fatal cancer risk of between 1 in 5000 and 1 in 7000.  

These studies highlight the substantial underestimation by medical staff of patient and operator related radiation induced cancer risk.  

The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) has recently revised the radiation dose for typical x-ray examinations. For example, an abdominal/pelvic CT scan would typically lead to an effective dose of 10 mSv, which is an equivalent of 4.5 years of natural background radiation.  

This radiation exposure was estimated to carry a 1:2000 risk of fatal cancer in the 16–69 year old patient population (personal communication from NRPB). For older patients, this may be halved but for younger patients increased up to fivefold. Put another way, this is equal to 250–300 fatal cancers for every 1 million abdominal/pelvic CT scans.  

These values are calculated using a probability coefficient, which was developed by the International Commission on Radiological Protection (ICRP), based on historical epidemiological cohorts and other research.  

It is worth noting that the cancer risk attributed to radiation exposure has constantly risen over time as longer term follow up information from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki cohorts have become available. It is therefore possible that radiation attributed cancer risk will continue to rise in the future.

In the UK, diagnostic x-rays related cumulative risk of cancer to age 75 years was recently estimated at 0.6%, which is equivalent to approximately 700 cases of cancer per year.  

In the same report, this rate was estimated to be up to five times higher for countries with a higher use of diagnostic x-rays. The British Society of Radiology has made specific recommendations to reduce radiation exposure.  

Adherence to these guidelines may well be an explanation for the comparatively low frequency of diagnostic x-ray in UK practice.  

Clinicians should use these recommendations when considering radiological investigations. Protection of operators and nursing staff using recommended protective clothing should also be followed. Change in clinical practice may not be easy to achieve as, for example, endoscopic capacity to reduce the number of alternative radiological investigations, such as barium enema, is limited. In contrast, barium enemas are often used to reduce the demand on endoscopic services. New technologies and methods may well reduce radiation exposure. Examples in gastroenterology include magnetic resonance cholangiopancreatography or endoscopic ultrasonography instead of ERCP and magnetic resonance enteroclysis instead of small bowel enema. Technological advances, in particular low dose helical CT scans, may reduce radiation exposure by 40–70%.  

However, availability of these technologies is limited or only slowly increasing and it is therefore unlikely that their use will influence radiation exposure in the near future. What remains is the judicious use of radiological investigations and close liaison with radiologists in order to keep the radiation exposure of patients and staff as low as possible.

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doi: 10.1136/gut.2005.066605

Conflict of interest: None declared.

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Can gastro-oesophageal reflux be predicted while advancing the endoscope through the laryngeal area?

We read with great interest the article by Mullhaupt et al regarding examination of the laryngopharyngeal area during gastro-intestinal endoscopy, after being trained for examination of these anatomical structures (Gut 2004;53:1232–4). Twenty six laryngeal pathologies were discovered in 1311 cases, the most important of which was demonstration of an early supraglottic cancer.

Upper gastrointestinal endoscopy has been performed in children for various indications. In paediatric gastroenterology practice, endoscopy is an important procedure beginning from the mouth. After inserting the endoscope through the oral cavity, the uvula, epiglottis, and cricoarytenoid cartilages with the vocal cords above are seen. While passing through the epiglottic area, the concomitant laryngitis, oedema, hyperaemia or ulceration of the arytenoids, and laryngeal granulomas can be visualised. Examination of the laryngopharyngeal area is not a routine part of the endoscopic procedure in children.

Although supraglottic cancer is extremely rare among children, a more common problem of the laryngeal area during childhood is gastro-oesophageal reflux (GOR), which affects almost 10% of children. Recurrent upper or lower respiratory tract infections, and weight loss are frequent clinical findings with GOR. Extraoesophageal manifestations of GOR have been identified and recognised more during the past decade. The phrase “extraoesophageal reflux” refers to the effects of refluxed gastric material far from the esophagus. It has been shown that the contents of the gastric juice, including hydrochloric acid and pepsin, are damaging not only to the esophagus but also to pharyngeal and laryngeal tissues. Resistance of the laryngeal mucosa to refluxed gastric contents during upper respiratory tract infections is an important factor in determining the severity of laryngeal injury. Gaynor and colleagues reported the otolaryngological manifestations of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GERD) and stated that the presence of erythema, oedema of the arytenoids and posterior part of the vocal cords, or more chronic changes such as the presence of granulomas might suggest GOR in aetiology.

In our paediatric gastroenterology outpatient clinic, 375 upper gastrointestinal endoscopies were performed in children aged

Adalimumab in pregnancy

Infliximab, a chimeric antibody to tumour necrosis factor alpha (TNF-α), has demonstrated efficacy for the induction and maintenance of remission in patients with Crohn’s disease. Antibodies to the chimeric component of infliximab can lead to infusion reactions and possible loss of response. A human recombinant monoclonal antibody to TNF-α, adalimumab, has recently demonstrated safety and efficacy for induction of remission in Crohn’s disease. It has also been effective in patients who have lost response to infliximab. Currently, this drug is FDA approved for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis but it is being administered off label for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis and Crohn’s disease. Crohn’s Disease cA2 Study Group. Maintenance infliximab for Crohn’s disease: the IBD Artist trial. Gastroenterology 2003;124:576–84.

While the health of the mother is our priority as gastroenterologists, the safety of inflammatory bowel disease medications during the childbearing years is always of concern. As biological agents are increasingly being used for maintenance therapy in Crohn’s disease, more patients are healthy enough to consider conception. Careful data collection and prospective study is required to be able to guide the management of men and women with inflammatory bowel disease desiring conception to ensure the health of the parent and child.

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doi: 10.1136/gut.2005.065417

Conflict of interest: declared (the declaration can be viewed on the GUT website at http://www.gut.com/supplemental/).

References


three months to 17 years, between 2003 and September 2004. The laryngopharyngeal area was investigated in 207 children during the endoscopic procedure and of these, 40 children had oedema of the vocal cords or arytenoids. Sixteen of these cases were due to caustic material ingestion; the remaining 24 had upper gastrointestinal endoscopy for other indications. Among the 24 cases with laryngopharyngeal pathology, 11 had hyperaemia and mucosal nodularity in the proximal and, 14 in the distal, part of the oesophagus. When the proximal and distal oesophageal biopsies were compared in this group, 37% had proximal and 66% had distal histological oesophagitis. Therefore, the presence of laryngeal oedema made us suspect GOR, and it is now routine for us to take oesophageal biopsies from the upper and lower parts of the oesophagus. The study of Mullhall et al, the importance of macroscopically noticeable laryngeal lesions during endoscopy among adult patients was emphasised and the most important result was to be discovery of an early supraglottic carcinoma. Upper gastrointestinal endoscopy is also an important procedure for the diagnosis of GOR and its supraglottic manifestations, if it is performed by an endoscopist who has been trained in the normal anatomy and pathology of the laryngeal area. Thus we agree with inspection of the laryngopharyngeal area, not only for evaluation of malignancies (although seen extremely rare among children) but also for extraoesophageal manifestations of GOR.

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References

Is stool DNA multitarget testing an unreliable strategy for colorectal cancer screening?
The availability of a simple non-invasive test capable of detecting colorectal cancer specific products with reasonable sensitivity and specificity might avoid the invasiveness, unpleasant bowel preparation, and risk of bleeding and perforation related to colonoscopy. Molecular marker combinations in faecal DNA testing have been shown to produce high rates of both colorectal cancer and advanced adenoma detection in selected patient populations, and observations from large representative groups are emerging. Imperiale and colleagues have recently reported the results of the first large study of faecal DNA testing in asymptomatic subjects. A total of 4404 average risk adults, who were at least 50 years old, underwent faecal occult blood testing, faecal DNA testing, and colonoscopy, which was considered the reference standard. Comparing test results in a random subgroup of 2507 persons, the authors found that the faecal DNA test was much more sensitive than faecal occult blood testing in detecting colorectal cancer and adenomas with high grade dysplasia. However, the sensitivity for both the faecal DNA panel and faecal occult blood testing was low. In particular, the faecal DNA test detected only 52% of colorectal cancers and 15% of adenomas, rates that were far lower than those previously reported in the literature for multitarget testing. Furthermore, in the same study, the sensitivity of faecal occult blood testing (13%) was unexpectedly low.

Interestingly, in the results section, Imperiale and colleagues reported that “among 1423 subjects with negative findings on colonoscopy, 79 had a positive faecal DNA panel and 68 had a positive Hemoccult II test, for specificities of 94.4% and 95.2%, respectively”. The question immediately arises as to whether these patients subsequently developed adenomas or polyyps and consequently whether the results from the DNA stool test or faecal occult blood test were falsely or truly positive. In fact, colonoscopy could have produced false negative results for several reasons, including misinterpretation of what was visualised or failure to perform adequate biopsy of the lesions seen. In this case, it could be intriguing to compare the ability of faecal DNA panel versus that of the Hemoccult II test in predicting the early occurrence of “advanced neoplasia” when colonoscopy misses the disease.

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doi: 10.1136/gut.2005.066951
Conflict of interest: None declared.

References

CD40 antisense based strategy for inflammatory bowel disease: shutting down multiple cellular communication systems
We read with great interest the paper by Gao et al, where the authors clearly proved the efficacy of a CD40 antisense oligonucleotide for the treatment of trinitrobenzene sulphonic acid (TNBS) induced colitis in rats (Gut 2005;54:70–7). Their results are in keeping with previous reports in which immunomodulation of CD40 ligand (L) was also able to ameliorate experimental colitis. The authors conclude that interruption of interactions between CD40 bearing monocytes and endothelial cells and CD40L positive T cells is crucial for the beneficial effect exerted by CD40 antisense oligonucleotide in TNBS induced experimental colitis.

In the past few years we have been investigating the role of the CD40/CD40L pathway in the pathogenesis of inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). We and others have recently shown that, apart from endothelial cells and monocytes, human intestinal fibroblasts (HIF) also express CD40L on their surface. HIF significantly upregulate CD40 expression, both at the mucosal and submucosal levels, in patients with active IBD. Moreover, we and others have shown that coculture of CD40 expressing HIF with CD40L T cells induces fibroblast activation, leading to chemokine and cytokine production, cell adhesion molecule upregulation, and activation of the intracellular signalling machinery, by triggering MAP kinases and nuclear factor κB activation. All of these events are biologically relevant for the inflammatory process as fibroblast derived chemokines mediate T cell recruitment. Another intriguing observation is the demonstration that CD40L T cells modulate collagen synthesis by HIF, thus suggesting the potential involvement of the CD40/CD40L pathway in stromal formation in Crohn’s disease (CD). Therefore, blockade of HIF CD40 is another potential mechanism for the therapeutic efficacy of CD40 antisense.

We have also shown that platelets express high levels of biologically active surface CD40 in a constitutive manner. This molecule provides a novel pathway for platelet activation, as shown by the observation of RANTES release after platelet stimulation. These events are particularly relevant at sites of intense immune activation where local inflamed endothelial cells retain RANTES on their surface and mediate T cell adhesion, thus locally amplifying the inflammatory response. Moreover, recently published studies showed that CD40L positive T cells could stimulate CD40 endothelium, and that CD40L4040 antisense could prevent such cell interactions. Recently, we
have described that apart from T cells, activated platelets also express CD40L. Platelets display enhanced levels of membrane bound CD40L in CD and ulcerative colitis patients, and secrete higher amounts of soluble CD40L, compared with healthy controls. These phenomena have biological relevance in terms of intestinal microvascular activation as IBD activated platelets trigger chemokine production, VCAM-1, ICAM-1, and CD40L upregulation, and T cell adhesion to the gut endothelium. Therefore, abrogation of endothelial or platelet CD40 expression would not only block T cell-endothelial interaction but also interrupt platelet-endothelial and platelet-leucocyte cell cross-talk in the gut microvasculature.

Taken together, these observations suggest that the CD40 antisense oligonucleotide used by Gao et al exerts its beneficial effect not only by disrupting the interaction between CD40 bearing monocytes and endothelial cells and CD40L positive T cells, but also by acting on a much wider array of cell types able to express either CD40 or CD40L. We conclude that the use of CD40 antisense oligonucleotides appears to be a very promising therapeutic approach to turn off intestinal inflammation, by disconnecting a crucial and almost ubiquitous communication system used by multiple cell types during inflammation.

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Conflict of interest: None declared.

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Masterclass in Crohn’s disease
A masterclass in Crohn’s disease will be held in Oxford on Wednesday 31 August 2005. This masterclass has been designed for consultants and registrars, including those who do not specialise in gastroenterology. Topics will include aetiology, differential diagnosis, and management. The course fee is £110 and board and accommodation is available at Wadham College at extra cost.

Six bursaries will be available for applicants training in gastroenterology or in research posts in British hospitals.

For further details and application forms contact: Professor Derek P Jewell, Radcliffe Infirmary, Woodstock Road, Oxford OX2 6HE, UK; tel +44 1865 224829; fax: +44 1865 790792; email: derek.jewell@ndm.ox.ac.uk; website: http://www.medicine.ox.ac.uk/gastro.

Asian Pacific Digestive Week 2005
This will be held on 25–28 September 2005 in COEX, Seoul, Korea. It is hosted by APDW 2005 Organizing Committee in conjunction with Asian Pacific Association of Gastroenterology (APAGE), Asian Society of Digestive Endoscopy (APSDE), Asian Pacific Society for the Study of the Liver (APASL), and International Society for Digestive Surgery (ISDS). The theme is "Rediscovery of Asia for gastrointestinal diseases". The abstract submission deadline is 15 June 2005 and early bird registration deadline is 30 June 2005.

For further information contact the Secretary General, Jin-Ho Kim, University of Ulsan, 1510 Hyosung Olympic County II, 175-12, Chamis-dong, Songpa-gu, Seoul 138-220, Korea; tel: +82 2 412 0673; fax: +82 2 412 0674; email: jhkim@amc.seoul.kr; website: http://www.APDW2005.org.
Is stool DNA multitarget testing an unreliable strategy for colorectal cancer screening?

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Gut 2005 54: 891
doi: 10.1136/gut.2005.066951

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