Correspondence

Eosinophilic colitis

SIR.—When we read the report by Moore et al on eosinophilic gastroenteritis with isolated colonic involvement (Gut 1986; 27: 1219–22) we were reminded of a similar patient we have been following for five years.

In November 1981 a 12 year old girl was seen with an eight week history of crampy lower abdominal pain, diarrhoea, and intermittent rectal bleeding. She averaged four bowel movements per day and occasionally a bowel movement at night. The stool was watery, brown in colour, and malodorous. The bleeding occurred with bowel movements, was bright red in colour and was mixed in with the stool. It varied in quantity. She denied fever, chills, anorexia, nausea or vomiting. Past health was unremarkable and functional inquiry was normal. Physical examination, upper gastrointestinal series and follow through, and barium enema were normal. Colonoscopy to the mid-transverse colon revealed numerous haemorrhagic blebs 1–2 mm in diameter. Some were intact and looked like ‘blood blisters’, while others had ruptured. The intervening mucosa was endoscopically normal and the rectum was spared. Multiple biopsies were obtained and reported as showing moderately severe inflammation with a high proportion of inflammatory cells being eosinophils. The inflammation did not extend past the muscularis mucosa. Crypt abscesses were not present, but sporadic cryptitis was seen. An unusual feature was that there was separation of the superficial mucosal epithelium from the underlying lamina propria.

Stools were negative for ova and parasites and no enteric pathogens were identified. Scotch tape test for pinworm was negative. Mild iron deficiency anaemia was present. The white blood cell count was normal without eosinophilia. Serum immunoglobulins including IgE were normal. Skin tests using the prick technique against milk, eggs, and wheat were negative. Complement studies were normal. A mild product elimination diet was tried for one month without benefit. Hydrocortisone enemas (100 mg) were given nightly for one week with resolution of the bleeding and diarrhoea. Nine months later symptoms recurred. Investigation revealed the same colonoscopic and histologic features. Symptoms rapidly resolved with a one week course of oral prednisone 15 mg daily. The prednisone was tapered. In the subsequent four years she had intermittent rectal bleeding with bowel movements. The bleeding could be minimised by keeping the stools soft with a high fibre diet.

In September 1986 the patient underwent flexible sigmoidoscopy and biopsy. Again, 1–2 mm superficial vascular blebs were seen. The intervening mucosa was normal. Biopsies were obtained from both normal and abnormal areas. The endoscopically normal areas were also histologically normal, whereas the endoscopically abnormal areas showed a marked degree of inflammation with infiltration of eosinophils, plasma cells and lymphocytes. Like Moore’s patient, ours had gastrointestinal blood loss, iron deficiency anaemia, and an eosinophilic colitis without evidence of more extensive gut involvement. There are a number of differences, however, our patient had no history of atopy and her peripheral eosinophil count was normal. The colonoscopic appearances were distinctly different. Whereas Moore’s patient had ‘erythematous granular and friable mucosa’, our patient had discrete tiny ‘blood blisters’ with normal intervening mucosa and sparing of the rectum. Two short courses of corticosteroids led to prompt clinical improvement. The cause of this peculiar and presumably rare condition remains obscure.

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Bile acid secretion in cystic fibrosis

SIR.—It is pleasing to note that other workers have studied bile acid secretion and pancreatic function in cystic fibrosis; however, we must take exception to the implication by Weizman et al that these studies have not been attempted before. Our previous work published a year ago in this journal 1 and as an abstract in Gastroenterology in 1984 2 addressed the same area of research.

The main difference in the two studies is that our patients were considerably younger (mean age 6-6 years v 21-7 years). Consequently, our finding of normal bile acid secretion rates in response to cholecystokinin/secretin differs from the lowered secretion rates from the latest study in older children. Our paper clearly shows a subgroup of older children (mean age 9-2 years) who also had lowered bile acid secretion rates and serum bile acid evidence of liver disease.

It is pleasing to see that bile acid secretion rates in controls and older children obtained in our study by a high performance thin layer chromatography method are almost identical to the rates found by Weizman et al using an enzymatic bile acid method. The conclusion from the studies is that total bile acid secretion rates are normal in young cystic fibrosis patients and deteriorate with age, probably because
of reduced gall bladder function and/or development of liver disease.

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References

Books


This is a curious volume, which starts off as one thing and ends up as another. It opens, predictably and properly, with the clinical gospel according to Spiegelhalter, Knill-Jones, and de Dombal, which may be summarised by saying that if only doctors were more consistent, the outcome of their deliberations would be more predictable, and vice versa. Thereafter, the editors seem to have lost confidence or even interest in their chosen subject. Bennett does address the topic of oesophageal symptoms, but other contributors seem less interested in symptomatology. Drossman and Lowman, for example, write on ‘Epidemiology, diagnosis, and treatment’ of irritable bowel syndrome, and ‘Diarrhoea as a symptom’ has a similar orientation. ‘Alcohol-related symptoms’ appears to consider that haematological and biochemical changes are ‘symptoms’. There isn’t anything wrong with the chapters; it’s just that you wouldn’t expect to find them sold under this general title, and this materially reduces the value of this book. Editorial inconsistency seems to be a recurring problem with this series.

DAVID WINGATE


The editor, Professor John Walker-Smith, is an Australian exiled in London. It is therefore appropriate that he has chosen a group of collaborators almost exclusively from Australia or London to review growing points in a now thriving specialty of paediatric gastroenterology. The selection of subjects is personal, but timely – antigen handling, infectious diarrhoea, food sensitive enteropathies, inflammatory bowel disease, intestinal motility, nutrition in cystic fibrosis, abnormalities of the biliary tree, chronic active hepatitis, congenital microvillus atrophy.

The individual chapters are of good quality, with up to date references (to early 1985). The volume can be highly recommended both to adult gastroenterologists (for interest) and to paediatric gastroenterologists (for essential information.)

ALEXANDER S MCNEISH


Topics were selected for this issue because of recent advances in that area, because of clinical importance or because they are not well known to the liver specialist or internist. Despite such disparate reasons a wonderful choice has been made by these two French experts, – Professor Jean-Pierre Benhamou with his critical appraisal of the clinical data, and Professor Didier Lebrec with his enthusiasm particularly in the pharmacological area.

Although many of the contributors have been drawn from Europe, there are also authors from America, Canada, South America, and England. As a person long interested in portal hypertension, I have to read the whole volume and I was rarely disappointed. The editors themselves contribute a superb chapter on non-cirrhotic portal hypertension; there is also new information on varices in unusual sites, and the occurrence of pulmonary arterial hypertension has never been so extensively reviewed previously. For the practising doctor there are excellent accounts on the management of acute variceal haemorrhage and present position of pharmacological therapy. There are also specific and excellent accounts of portal hypertension in childhood, and in areas of the world where schistosomiasis is rife.

The reviewer was asked to assess the volume as to whether it was up to date, comprehensive and useful. It is all three, and I do not know of a better volume around.

ROGER WILLIAMS


Anyone involved in clinical medical research is encouraged to persist by the prospect, all too often a