Letters, Book reviews


EDITOR,—We recently showed the importance of nitric oxide synthase (NOS) of intestinal mucosa. It may play a role in various gastrointestinal functions. We have found that nitric oxide synthase (NOS) of intestinal mucosa may be involved in the pathogenesis of intestinal inflammation. The role of NOS in the regulation of intestinal inflammation remains to be elucidated.


Following an initial study examining the need for an antireflux procedure during laparoscopic Heller’s cardiotomy,1 we have now completed a prospective study of 30 patients undergoing such surgery with a protocol that includes pre and postoperative 24 hour pH monitoring. The 12 patients who have undergone preoperative pH monitoring had a medical or oesophageal com- pose DeMeester score of 0.45 (range 0.2–16.8) (upper limit of normal 14.72 at pH threshold 4) only one patient showed abnormal oesophageal acidity at this stage. Postoperatively in 10 patients the mean DeMeester score increased to 6.00 (range 0.2–19.6) with two patients lying outside the normal range, one of whom had probably had an inadequate myotomy.

Preoperatively significant reflux was extremely uncommon and these results do not support the hypothesis that the heartburn experienced by patients with achalasia is due to acid reflux. Even after a myotomy completely dividing the lower oesophageal sphincter very few patients showed significant GORD despite their aperistaltic oesophagus and it seems likely that factors such as the presence of a hiatal hernia or the presence of hiatus hernia may confer beneficial anti-inflammatory effects with reduced cardiovascular complications.

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Heartburn in patients with achalasia

EDITOR.—We were interested to read the thought provoking paper on heartburn in patients with achalasia, in which the authors hypothesised that the heartburn described by 48% of achalasia patients eligible for review was related to gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) and documented on manometry a relative reduction in basal lower oesophageal sphincter pressure in such patients (Gut 1995; 37: 305–8).

They themselves note that there are many alternative causes for heartburn in patients with achalasia and performed no pH monitoring to support what they admit remains speculation. However, if such a group of patients did exist and could be reliably selected they would clearly be candidates for an antireflux procedure at the time of treatment by surgical myotomy.

BOOK REVIEWS


The explosion in information technology has revolutionised the way knowledge is sought and processed, but in a manner that reduces the impact of pictorial images on education. The role of the classic textbook as a pivotal tool to teaching is increasingly challenged by...