LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cholecystectomy and bowel function

EDITOR,—I read with great interest the article by Hearing et al (Gut 1999;49:889–894) on the effect of cholecystectomy on bowel function. In this elegant presentation, however, the authors mistakenly assume that published estimates of the proportion of patients with postcholecystectomy diarrhea derive from retrospective or uncontrolled data only. In this context I would like to draw attention to earlier publications derived from the Rotterdam Gallstone Study.1

In the first paper the results are discussed of a prospective analysis of biliary and gastrointestinal symptoms (including diarrhea) prior to and up to two years after gall stone therapy. The therapy consisted of either conventional cholecystectomy or extracorporeal shock wave lithotripsy (ESWL), allocated randomly. The second paper focused on surgery and reported on symptoms before and after conventional and laparoscopic cholecystectomy.2 This study was based on the same concept, and treatment depended on the availability of a laparoscopic set. Generally, we found that the reported incidence of diarrhea before and after surgery did not change. In fact, there was no difference in the reported incidence of diarrhea at any time between cholecystectomy and gall bladder preserving therapy (that is, ESWL). We also found that there were no differences in the reported incidence or severity of diarrhea between laparoscopic and conventional cholecystectomy at any time.

Although the study design of our two studies differed largely from that of Hearing’s, the results and conclusions are in agreement, in that clinical diarrhea seldom develops after cholecystectomy. O’Donnell is correct that objective clinical diarrhea seldom develops after cholecystectomy,2 but it is not necessary to assume that this is an unproved entity. Given our results and conclusions are in agreement, in that subjective symptoms rarely demonstrate new onset diarrhea.7

However, the author quotes Hearing et al (1999) who quote, “One cannot rule out the fact that antigenic shedding of H pylori from the stomach throughout the gastrointestinal tract or the presence of specific T cells alone was able to provide the colon lesion with an antigenic drive needed for maintenance of the lymphoma. In this scenario, one would expect eradication of H pylori to lead to regression of the (the still antigen and/or T cell dependent) lymphoma. The fact that various (apparently not H pylori related) intestinal as well as extraintestinal lesions regressed with antibiotic treatment is indeed highly suggestive of an underlying infectious process but does not necessarily constitute proof of this assumption, as direct antiproliferative mechanisms of various antibiotics, including clarithromycin, have been reported in different settings. Further investigations are needed before definite recommendations for (as yet empirical) antibiotic therapy in patients with extragastrointestinal MALT lymphomas can be given.3

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Guidelines for the management of iron deficiency anaemia

EDITOR,—It is somewhat self contradictory to suggest that “a transferrin saturation of <30% may help the diagnosis” if there is still doubt about validation of iron deficiency after receipt of the serum ferritin result, the authors having previously acknowledged that the latter is “the most powerful test for iron deficiency” (Gut 2000;46(suppl IV):v1–5). Statistical considerations which dictate that serum ferritin will always outrank transferrin in the pre-dictive power have their basis in the comparison between the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curves for serum ferritin versus transferrin saturation, yielding values of 0.91 versus 0.71 (p<0.001) for the area under the curve.4 Statistical considerations also dictate acknowledgement of mean corpuscular haemoglobin (MCH) as a predictive entity in its own right following documentation than an MCH of <27 pg was superior to a mean corpuscular volume (MCV) of <77 fl in predicting serum ferritin levels of <20 μg/l.5 All low MCV values had low MCH values but nine hypoferremic patients with low MCH had MCV within the normal range.

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MALT lymphomas and Helicobacter pylori?

EDITOR,—Raderer et al (Gut 2000;46:133–5) present an interesting case report of a patient with a mucoesa associated lymphoid tissue (MALT) lymphoma of the stomach and descending colon. Their report adds to the growing literature of gastrointestinal MALT lymphomas that respond to antibiotic treatment. In addition to the numerous reports on antibiotic sensitive gastric lymphomas of the small intestine, salivary glands, nasal mucosa, colon2 have recently been reported.

Although Helicobacter pylori is generally implicated as the inducing agent, this does not always appear to be the case.3–5 Delayed bacteraemia, H형 hemagglutinin, has also been found in association with gastric MALT lymphomas, including H pylori negative patients whose disease was still responsive to antibiotic treatment.6 Furthermore, other non-H pylori bacterial7 and protozoal8 flora have been observed in gastric lymphomas specific to involved regions. In the report by Raderer et al, and in several of the cases previously mentioned,9 H pylori was not identified in the extragastric lesions, leaving it open to speculation how H pylori may induce antigenic stimulation of these lymphomas. Moreover, in the report by Inoue and Chiba,1 not only was the rectal lesion H pylori negative but upper gastrointestinal endoscopy was normal. Their patient was seronegative for H pylori and had a negative rapid urea test, culture, and histological examination.

In light of this evidence, it seems that although H pylori may be the most common cause of many gastrointestinal MALT lymphomas, it is not the only causative organism. This is an important consideration when patients are confronted with diagnoses of Helicobacter pylori negative MALT lymphomas.

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In my study, comprising 201 subjects with iron deficiency (characterised by serum ferritin <18 µg/l), the MCH conferring optimum trade off between specificity (65.2%) and sensitivity (65.9%) for iron deficiency was <24 pg, and this yielded a positive predictive value of 70%. By contrast, for MCV, optimum trade off between sensitivity (61.7%) and specificity (59.1%) was obtained with a cut off level of <77 fl, giving a positive predictive value of 65%. There were 31 patients with an MCH <26 pg in the presence of an MCV >80 fl compared with only four with an MCV <80 fl in the presence of an MCH >24 pg and, among these, four had an MCH <24 pg in the presence of an MCV >77 fl in contrast with only one with an MCV <77 fl in the presence of an MCH >24 pg. In my study, the most stringent cut off diagnostic level for iron deficiency was a serum ferritin level <10 µg/l found in a subgroup of 145 subjects. At this level, the MCH characterised by optimum trade off between sensitivity (65%) and specificity (66%) was <76 fl (identical with the cut off level in the guidelines), and this yielded a positive predictive value of 55%. Correspondingly, the optimum MCH was either <25 pg, characterised by sensitivities, specificities, and positive predictive values of 74%, 59%, and 80%, respectively, or <23 pg, characterised by sensitivities, specificities, and positive predictive values of 58%, 75%, and 62%, respectively.

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CORRECTION

Two abstracts in Gut 2000;47(suppl III) had incomplete author lists. The authors of A136 are L Sarli, R Costi, S Gobbi, D Iusco, R Costi, and the authors of A138 are L Sarli, R Costi, S Gobbi, C Pavlidis, L Roncoroni, and Professor Eammon Quigley (Cork, Ireland). Further information: Maddalena Massaro, Project Leader, AISC-AIM Group, Via A Ristori 38, 00187 Rome, Italy. Tel: +39 06 809681; fax: +39 06 80968229; email: gastro2001@aisc.it.

NOTES

American College of Gastroenterology 2001 International GI Training Grants Programme

The ACG International GI Training (IGT) Grant Programme provides funding for clinical or clinical research training in gastroenterology and hepatology so that an individual can acquire or develop new cognitive knowledge or a technical skill. This newly acquired knowledge or skills should serve to improve patient care in the applicant’s geographic area. Physicians outside of the United States and Canada are eligible to apply. At least one fellowship with a maximum of $10,000 per IGT fellowship will be awarded during 2001, for a training period of not less than six months. Awards will be made by a special committee of the ACG and will be based upon the applicant’s credentials, the merit of the proposed training or research and the host training centre and the potential for enhancing the field of gastroenterology in the applicant’s home country. Application forms can be obtained from the ACG administrative office: 4900 B South 31st Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206-1656. Tel: +1 703 820 7400; fax: +1 703 931 4520; website: www.acg.org. Deadline for submission of application is 1 April 2001.

Cleveland Clinic Florida’s Gastroenterology Update 2001

Cleveland Clinic Florida will be sponsoring a postgraduate course entitled “Gastroenterology Update 2001” to be held on 10–11 February 2001 in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, USA. Further information: Sally Jagelman, Manager of Continuing Medical Education, Cleveland Clinic Florida, 3000 West Cypress Creek Road, Fort Lauderdale, FL 33309, USA. Tel: +1 954 978 5539; fax: +1 954 978 5056; email: jagelman@ccf.org

GI malignancies can be prevented and treated: from the bench to the bedside

This international meeting will be held on 14–17 February 2001 in Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, Israel. Further information: Mari- lyn Katz, Secretariat, GI Malignancies, Target Tours, PO Box 29041, Tel Aviv 61290, Israel. Tel: +972 3 5175150; fax: +972 3 5175151; email: gi@targetconf.com

Redefining Priorities in Gastroenterology

This congress will be held on 11–14 April 2001 in Monte Carlo, Italy. It will be chaired by Professor Massimo Cresti (Rome, Italy) and Professor Emmon Quigley (Cork, Ireland). Further information: Maddalena Massaro, Project Leader, AISC-AIM Group, Via A Ristori 38, 00187 Rome, Italy. Tel: +39 06 809681; fax: +39 06 80968229; email: gastro2001@aisc.it.

3rd European Federation of Autoimmune Societies (EFAS)

The third European Federation of Autoimmune Societies (EFAS) meeting in conjunction with the annual meeting of the sections “Autoimmune nervous system” of the German Neurological Society, “Diabetes and Nervous System” of the German Neurological Society, and “Autoimmune Nervous System” at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, Germany, will be held in Erlangen, Germany on 26–28 April 2001. Further information: Professor Dr M J Hila, Department of Neurology, University or Erlangen-Nuremberg, Schwabachanlage 6, D-91054 Erlangen, Germany. Tel: +49 0131 8534444; fax: +49 0131 8534528; website: www.medizin.med.uni-erlangen.de/ oeffentliche_Veranstaltungen.htm

Gastroenterology and Endotherapy: XIXth European Workshop

This course, to introduce the experienced gastroenterologist to the growing field of therapeutic endoscopy, will be held on 18–20 June 2001 in Brussels, Belgium. Further information: Mrs Nancy Beauprez, Gastroenterology Department, Erasme Hospital, Route de Lennik 808, B-1070 Brussels. Tel: +32 02 555 49 00; fax: +32 02 555 49 01; email: beauprez@ulb.ac.be

Falk Symposium

The symposium entitled Update in Inflammatory Bowel Diseases will be held in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on 5 May 2001. Further information: Prof Dr S Marković, University Medical Center Ljubljana, Division of Internal Medicine, Japhleva 2, 1525 Ljubljana, Slovenia. Tel: +386 (1) 231 6925; fax: +386 (1) 433 4190; email: ssa.markovic@kclj.si

Summer Abdominal Imaging Conference

A five day course designed for the practising radiologist with a primary interest in abdominal imaging, emphasising the most recent advances in helical CT, MRI, US, and gastrointestinal imaging. It will be held on 23–27 July 2001 in Banff Springs, Canadian Rockies. Twenty-five category 1 credit hours. Further information: Janice Ford Benner, University of Pennsylvania Medical Center (Radiology), 3400 Spruce Street, 1 Silverstein Building, Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA. Tel: +1 215 662 6904; fax: +1 215 349 5925.