Severe polyneuropathy complicating active Crohn’s disease: rapid response to Infliximab

Treatment with a chimeric antitumour necrosis factor (TNF) antibody (Infliximab) has been shown to be highly efficient for patients with steroid refractory Crohn’s disease (CD). However, the mechanism of action remains largely unknown. Recently, a favourable response to Infliximab treatment was demonstrated in some diseases complicating active CD such as acute idiopathic pancreatitis. We report a case of a middle aged female with CD that developed an aggressive form of polyneuritis resistant to corticosteroids. That developed an aggressive form of polyneuritis resistant to corticosteroids.

An infusion of 3 mg/kg Infliximab (Remicade; Schering-Plough SpA) was given at weeks 0, 2, and 6. A repeated 5 mg/kg Infliximab infusions at eight week intervals were administered. Infliximab was well tolerated and no side effects were recorded. Arthralgias, myalgias, and functional impotence of the right arm and leg progressively improved after the first Infliximab infusion. Muscle atrophy of the right arm improved dramatically two weeks later. Electromyography performed at week 22 after the start of therapy was normal. CD41 score is <150 at this time. Sign and symptoms of chronic corticosteroid therapy rapidly disappeared.

In conclusion, Infliximab may be a suitable therapeutic option in patients with rare extraintestinal manifestations of CD such as severe polyneuritis not responding to conventional therapy.

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Gastroenterol Hepatol 2002;17(suppl 1):176–85.

Caution with the use of cyclosporin in pregnancy

We read the article by Alstead and Nelson-Piercy with great interest.

We report a case (submitted for publication) of a woman with fulminant ulcerative colitis in the 29th week of pregnancy. Her disease was refractory to steroids, but she refused to have cyclosporin whilst pregnant. She therefore underwent an emergency Caesarean section and was given intravenous cyclosporin post-operatively. After 48 hours of treatment she developed severe hypertension with hypertensive encephalopathy and seizures. Although cyclosporin has been considered to be safe for both mother and foetus, we would like to highlight concerns that it is associated with potentially life threatening side effects. As a result, patients must be counselled thoroughly about the potential morbidity associated with this treatment and monitored closely. We agree with Dr Alstead that cyclosporin should be used with extreme caution in pregnancy and the postnatal period.

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References
2002;17(suppl 1):176–85.

Coeliac disease: is case finding the correct ethical and logistical approach?

I read with interest the debate pertaining to screening for coeliac disease (CD). Although one can argue that CD fulfils the tenets of any screening programme, however, we do not know the natural history of screen detected patients with CD. Logistically when would we decide to screen—at what age and how often thereafter? Serological markers may be highly sensitive and specific but the value of these tests decrease when they are used in the general population. Although the investigational process for population screening and case finding may be the same, there is an important ethical difference between them. If a patient seeks medical help then the physician is attempting to diagnose the underlying condition (for example: patients with CD who present with symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome). This would be classified as case finding and clearly it is the patient who has initiated the consultation and in some sense is consenting for investigation. Conversely, individuals (who are not patients) found to have CD through screening programmes, may have considered themselves as "well" and it is the physician or healthcare system that is identifying them as potentially ill.

We recently performed a primary care based cross sectional study using immunoglobulins, IgA/IgG antigliadin antibodies and endomy- niosal antibodies to initially recognise CD. 1200 volunteers were recruited from January 1999 to June 2001 from 5 general practices in South Yorkshire, UK. Any participant with a positive IgA antigliadin antibody, positive endomysial antibody or only IgG antigliadin antibody in the presence of IgA deficiency was offered a small bowel biopsy to confirm the diagnosis of CD. Twelve new cases of CD were diagnosed from 1200 samples. The prevalence of CD in this primary care population sample is 1% (95% CI 0.4–1.3%). In this screening study, 9/12 diagnosed cases of CD ultimately had symptoms which could be attributed to CD (for example, anaemia or subtle gastro-intestinal symptoms). We, and others have demonstrated a delay in the diagnosis of CD—surely the important change in our clinical practice (both in primary and secondary care) is to have a low threshold for case finding. If you look for CD you will find it.

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Reference

www.gutjnl.com

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very large study conducted by an expert team in this field were that mean age at diagnosis was higher in men (p<0.01), mean FHN size smaller (p=0.001) and more are often performed (p<0.001) in men (n=18) than in women (n=216). Interestingly, perhaps because of the relatively small number of women (although very large in terms of the rare occurrence of FHN in men), no cases of multiple FHN were noted in the male population. We report here the presence of multiple FHN in a 74 year old patient with a biopsy proven prostatic cancer. This patient had not received any treatment. He was referred to our liver unit in March 2001 for evaluation of multiple liver masses discovered on abdominal ultrasonography during the staging of his cancer. Bone scintigraphy disclosed no metastases. Liver biochemistry was normal except for a mild increase in gamma glutamyl transferase activity. Prothrombin index was 100%. Serological search for hepatitis B or hepatitis C virus infection was negative. Genetic (haemochromatosis, alpha 1 antitrypsin deficiency) and autoimmune liver diseases were carefully excluded, and alcohol consumption was below 10 g/day. Upper gastrointestinal endoscopy and colonoscopy were normal. Therefore, the diagnosis of FHN was made in several of the multiple lesions with rapid contrast enhancement during the arterial phase. The largest lesion was located between the left liver and segment IV of the liver. Because there was no magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in our centre, ultrasound guided liver biopsy in both tumoral and non-tumoral areas was performed. The diagnosis of typical FHN was made in several of the lesions whereas non-tumoral liver was normal. The patient received hormonal treatment from April 2001. In October 2001, MRI confirmed a diagnosis of FHN with a central stellate area in the largest lesion. In December 2002, he was in good health with unchanged ultrasonography.

This case report is unique in that there were multiple lesions in a 74 year old patient who had not received any previous treatments or porto-caval shunt. Although from a literature search it is difficult to determine the exact number of men with multiplicity of FHN, the number of cases probably very low. In this report, the discrepancy between normal bone scintigraphy and the diagnosis of multiple liver lesions leads to the diagnosis of liver metastasis probable. Nevertheless, histological examination of several hepatic lesions, retrospective MRI and outcome made the diagnosis of multiple FHN certain. This report, in common with the large series of Luciani et al., indicates that FHN diagnosis may be very difficult in men. J F Cardranel, K Hadj-Nacer, J C Kikassa, A Cozier

Multiple focal nodular hyperplasia of the liver in a patient with prostatic cancer

We read with interest the study of Luciani and colleagues (Gut 2002;50:877–80) comparing focal nodular hyperplasia (FHN) of the liver in men and women. The major finding of this study is that CD was extremely rare. We have recently performed a large scale study that shows that CD is extremely effective in the USA, where the overall prevalence of CD in the USA is 1:133 in at-risk groups and between 2%–9% in at-risk groups, so proving that this disease was historically overlooked in the USA. If one studies the literature indicating that prolonged gluten exposure can lead to increased morbidity and mortality, one can see that the situation is not only medically and logistically incorrect, but also morally responsible for a poor outcome of our medical mission.

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References


Guidelines for colonscopic screening in acromegaly are inconsistent with those for other high risk groups

We welcome the joint work of the British Society of Gastroenterology and the Associate...
colonicoscopic screening recommended by Jenkins and Fairclough should be seriously questioned.

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Authors' reply

We thank Dr Renehan and colleagues for their comments on our data, which they have also made previously. We do not claim that our data are perfect in all respects but it seems to us, on the basis of the data we have collected in our own series and that of other groups, that patients with acromegaly should be regarded as having a significantly increased risk of colorectal neoplasia. The two contrary studies referred to by Renehan et al are his own and that of one other author who relied upon retrospective data acquired more than 50 years ago. These data and those from the population based studies preferred by Renehan suffer from flaws of their own. The morbidity associated with acromegaly has changed in the last 25 years, probably related to the increased survival associated with aggressive and effective treatment of the cardiovascular and metabolic complications of the disease. Our data and those of others show that the prevalence of colonic neoplasia in acromegaly is age dependent. Thus it is only now that patients are surviving long enough to develop this complication, and valid comparative data must therefore be acquired contemporaneously, to take account of the changing pattern of morbidity associated with increased longevity.

We are aware of at least 12 other prospective studies evaluating colonicoscopic screening in acromegaly in addition to our original report from St Bartholomew's Hospital. These include one by Renehan et al in which they reported three asymptomatic patients in whom a cancer was detected. Among such studies the optimum comparison must be simultaneous screening of asymptomatic non-acromegaly controls combined with comparison of the data from all series using these control groups, none of which involved mixed race US populations, gives a relative risk of colorectal cancer in acromegaly of 13.4. We therefore feel it is prudent to accept the evidence of an increased risk of colon cancer, derived from these clinical observations rather than from theoretical calculations, and to screen acromegalic patients systematically until the current hypothesis is confirmed or refuted. The rarity of acromegaly means that the increase in workload for the majority of indi-

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If we do not discount these cases then LIFE and MB appear to complimen 4QB for the detection of dysplasia, with each technique detecting coexisting dysplastic sites that the other missed.

I agree that LIFE and MB remain controversial and applaud the authors for publication of their LIFE trial. Given the results of the study however, it may be premature to proclaim these techniques incapable. More well conducted studies are clearly needed. The field of imaging technologies is also evolving rapidly and new and better techniques are constantly on the near horizon.

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Transient ischaemic colitis following an aeroplane flight

We read with interest the report of Butcher and colleagues (Gut 2002;51:746–7) of two cases of transient ischaemic colitis following an aeroplane flight. This report represents more evidence supporting the suggestion of a possible important role of acquired and hereditary thrombotic risk factors in the pathogenesis of ischaemic colitis.1 However, the largest study to date concerning these factors in patients with ischaemic colitis was not mentioned in the study. Moreover, the reported patients may also have other acquired or inherited thrombophilic disorders which were not evaluated. Lipoprotein (a), anticardiolipin antibodies, the C677T methyl-

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venous obstruction. It is possible that future identification of subgroups in ischaemic coli-
tis patients with sophisticated imaging tech-niques could distinguish cases with arterial or venous ischaemia.

In conclusion, we suggest that the mech-anism of ischaemic colitis is multifactorial. Acquired and genetic factors may interact leading to disease manifestation. Arrhythmia and embolic conditions, oral contraceptives, and other medications, as well long haul flights probably play a role in genetically pre-disposed individuals in the disease pathogen-

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The Handbook of Clinical Trials and Other Research


Clinicians are notorious for embarking upon research without a full understanding of methodology. Perhaps in the past clinical journals were guilty of publishing papers without being sufficiently critical. No doubt this was a byproduct of well meant refereeing by clinicians who were themselves hamstrung methodologically, and lacking insight.

In the new world of publications, the research design has to be explicit, well laid out, and sufficiently robust to support the research reported. Most doctors have had little or no training in research methods, despite having completed an MD. Thus, there might be one reason why it is becoming increasingly difficult for even research experienced clini-cians to initiate new projects. Indeed, there is a question mark as to whether research can now be done by service based clinicians or whether, because of the new stricter rules and disciplines, this should be left to the profes-sional researcher. Perhaps the answer is that clinicians ought to have access to experts who can not only guide them but see them through the entire project. Some have questioned whether clinical research still provides the answer, even if only in hope, is yes, but this will require a greater familiarity with research methodology, the patience to plan thought-fully, and with experienced researchers.

This handbook provides definitions and contemporary examples. It provides recent references from major journals and is well illustrated. It contains material beyond expla-nations of research terminology and method-ology including the new requirements for the Research Ethics Committees, and the EU Clinical Trials directive. The chapters are fast moving; in the UK there is a single electronic ethics application form now with new rules regarding consent for multicentre

BOOK REVIEWS

Gastrointestinal Mucosal Repair and Experimental Therapeutics


This book is a worthy addition to the Frontiers of Gastrointestinal Research series that focuses on specialised gastrointestinal research topics. This volume is the 25th of the series and highlights areas of current and emerging interest to investigators in the area of gastro-intestinal mucosal injury, repair, and thera-peutics.

The book is not a compilation of talks given at a conference but rather an honest attempt to inform interested scientists within that broad field. It has been a number of years since anyone has gathered the information for a reference book for his area, and the editors have intentionally chosen to invite experts to write on their specialised subjects. The em-phasis of the book is on the use of experimen-tal cell culture and animal models and, there-fore, will be of most use to basic researchers. The book is divided into three broad sections, covering epithelial restitution, mucosal repair and healing, and experimental therapeutics. The chapter authors have taken care to summarise what is known and what remains to be investigated. Several of the chapters provide an overview of a particular area, such as eval-uating those on angiogenesis, the diacylglycerol/ protein kinase C pathway, nitric oxide and its regulation, the roles of cyclooxygenase inhibi-tors, and the involvement of prostaglandin recep-tors in the gastrointestinal tract. Other chapters contain useful methodology regarding animal models and experimental tech-niques such as physical stress and strain. The chapters dealing with cytokines and Helico-bacter pylori infection are brief, but these sub-jects are adequately covered elsewhere in numerous reviews. New and potentially use-ful therapeutic possibilities are examined, including the use of platelets to deliver healing growth factors, the use of polysaccha-rides such as heparin for gastrointestinal pro-tection, and gene therapy with angiogenic growth factors.

It is not possible for any book to be complete and inclusive of all subjects in such a diverse field as mucosal repair and therapeu-tics, but this book does a more than reason-able job. It will be a very useful reference for research newcomers and veterans alike in the field.

E J Dial

The Scientific standard is high throughout the book. Each of the topics has been well researched by its authors and (with only one exception), chapters are well referenced. Of course one can find omissions but these are minor and very infrequent. The text is easy to read and the editors have ensured that the content is clinically relevant. Each chapter concludes with a useful table of annotated key references, and in some chapters a recom-mended management strategy is summarised in a box. The book is liberally illustrated with line drawings and both black and white and colour figures, which generally are informa-tive and clearly reproduced. The index is good; I was able, without difficulty, to locate a vari-ety of topics. Overall, the quality of the presentation is excellent, with very few typo-graphical errors. Although this is a compre-hensive book, it is not a large tome, but is comfortable and easy to read.

This book will serve as an invaluable resource for gastroenterologists, paediatricians, surgeons, nurses, and others involved in the surgical care of children with liver, biliary, or pancreatic disorders, whether at a specialist children’s centre or a district hospital, and will appeal to trainees, whose exposure these days to complex hepatobiliary surgery is limited. In addition, gastroenterologists and surgeons treating the increasing number of adults with disorders of childhood will find this book a most helpful companion.

D Lloyd
Hepatology Principles and Practice
E Kuntz, H-D Kuntz. Berlin: Springer Verlag, colour, pp 825. ISBN 3540 42161 0

“You have a very large parcel”, Zeinah, my secretary said breathlessly as she struggled up from the post room with a copy of this enormous book. It seemed all the heavier as I lugged it around the London bus network from the wilds of East Acton on my way home and then back to work several times. Contained in a reinforced Harrod’s bag, which was the only thing I could find that was strong enough to hold it while I elbowed my way through the myriads of commuters that were forced to travel by bus in lieu of the non-existent Central line, I felt my back pain had returned with a vengeance and did not know whether to take up weight training (where the book would come in handy) or admit defeat and sue the authors for damages. However, sanity soon prevailed and I soon became engrossed in this weighty tome.

At first glance, one could say that another comprehensive book on hepatology is really not needed, given all the other titles on the market, but it turns out that this 2002 English edition of the original German “Praktische Hepatologie”, published in 1998, has been updated and was a labour of love by Erwin Kuntz whose son, Hans-Dieter, died before the book could be finished. My schoolboy German is not up to the original edition but this has become a bible in Germany and the current version is welcome, despite the fact that a lot of the English is somewhat awkward with curious turns of phrase. Examples of this include “MRT”, rather than MRI, which is irritating, and “lethality”, rather than mortality, which interrupts one’s reading pattern. However, there are some very nice things about the book. It has an interesting section on the history of hepatology, perhaps written from a German perspective, since the late Dame Sheila Sherlock may have had a different take on events. Otherwise, there are 40 chapters, which are essentially written as a “hairdresser’s guide” to being a hepatologist, with nicely illustrated sections on anatomy (termed “morphology”) and biochemistry, before launching into sections on clinical findings and laboratory tests which are comprehensive, which interrupts the flow of the book. These are unusually detailed sections on how to perform liver biopsies and a practical manual on ultrasound (termed “sonography”), the likes of which I have not found in books from the English speaking world, probably because ultrasound is the domain of gastroenterologists in Germany but the preserve of radiologists in the UK. Nevertheless, this level of detail is useful for hepatology/gastroenterology SpRs who would like to interpret scans better but feel inhibited asking their local x-ray department for fear of looking stupid. However, the section on CT is scanty and on MRI (“MRT”) is almost non-existent by comparison. It is a shame that the chapter on cognitive testing and the investigations of the neurological sequela of liver disease does not contain detail on newer psychometric tests and technology such as MR spectroscopy, which is of the wealth of expertise on hepatic encephalopathy that currently exists in Germany. Chapters on the complications of chronic liver disease are well set out and those on liver abscesses, bacterial, parasitic, and fungal (“mycotic”) liver disease are useful.

The question of who may actually buy this book looms large. It is too big and too costly for any individual junior doctor who might be interested in this “user’s guide” approach that the book adopts. However, I would have thought given the fact that the format of its main competitor, the Sherlock book, is looking dated by comparison and that other books are not as visually inviting, the Kuntz tome would find a home in most hospital libraries, or if the local gastroenterology department is feeling flush, then on the shelf of the departmental secretary for reference use by all who pass by. For what it is worth, Zeinah has decided to check the strength of her newly reinforced shelves by clearing a space in her copy.

S D Taylor-Robinson

NOTICES

The Association of Coloproctology of Great Britain & Ireland

This annual meeting will be held on 7–10 July 2003 in Edinburgh, UK. Further details: Conference Secretariat, The ACGBI at the Royal College of Surgeons of England, 35–43 Lincoln’s Inn Fields, London WC2A 3PE. Tel: +44 (0)20 7973 0307; fax: +44 (0)20 7430 9233; email: acpgbi@acpgbi.org.uk; website: www.acpgbi.org.uk

European Helicobacter Study Group (EHSG)

This meeting, on Helicobacter infections and gastroduodenal pathology, will be held on 3–6 September 2003 in Stockholm, Sweden. Further details: Professor Torkel Wadstrom, President- EHSG, Lund University, Department of Infectious Diseases & Medical Microbiology, Division of Bacteriology, Solvagatan 23, SE-223 62 Lund, Sweden. Tel: +46 46 173 241; fax: +46 46 152 364; email: torkel.wadstrom@mmibi.lu.se; website: www.helicobacter.org

Falk Symposium

135—Immunological Diseases of Liver and Gut

This symposium will be held on 12–13 September 2003 in Prague, Czech Republic. Further details: Falk Foundation e.V., Congress Division, PO Box 6329, Leineweberstr. 5, 79041 Freiburg/Br, Germany. Tel: +49 761 15 140; fax: +49 761 15 14 359; email: symposia@falkfoundation.de; website: www.falkfoundation.de

The European Society of Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (ESPEN)

ESPEN will celebrate its silver anniversary at the time of the annual congress, which is to be held on 20–23 September 2003 in Cannes, France. Further details: www.espen.org

European Course on Laparoscopic Endoscopy

This course will be held on 18–21 November 2003 in Brussels, Belgium. Further details: Secretary to Professor Cadière, Service de Chirurgie Digestive, Rue Haute 322, Brussels 1000, Belgium. Tel: +32 (0) 2 647 86 94; email: straes.asmb@proximedia.be; website: www.straes-asmb.com

Hong Kong-Shanghai International Liver Congress 2004

This conference will be held on 14–17 February 2004 in Hong Kong. The topic of the conference is “Lever Diseases in the Post-Genomic Era”. Further details: Ms Kristie Leung, Room 102–105 School of General Nursing, Queen Mary Hospital, 102 Pokfulam Road, Hong Kong. Tel: +852 2818 4300/8101 2442; fax: +852 2818 4030; email: kristieleung@hepa2004.org; website: www.hepa2004.org