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).1 However, the mechanism of action remains largely unknown.1 Recently, a favourable response to Infliximab treatment was demonstrated in some diseases complicating active CD such as acute idiopathic pancreatitis.2 We report a case of a middle aged female with CD that developed an aggressive form of polyneuritis resistant to corticosteroids.3 We believe that this presentation should raise awareness of the potential for severe polyneuritis resistant to corticosteroids.

A 55 year old White female, weighting 68 kg, presented with exacerbation of CD (CDAI activity index (CDAI) >450) associated with an aggressive form of polyneuritis involving the right arm and leg with arthralgias, myalgias, and functional impotence. She had been suffering from refractory severe CD involving the ileum and right colon for 10 years and she was taking oral corticosteroids for two years continually with signs and symptoms of chronic corticosteroid abuse. Immunosuppressive therapy with azathioprine was rapidly stopped for gastric intolerance. Neuropathy was characterised by arthralgias, myalgias, and functional impotence of the right arm and leg. Severe muscle atrophy of the right arm was evident and deambulation was very difficult. Therapy with folate, vitamin B12, and vitamin B6 was ineffective. An infusion of 5 mg/kg Infliximab (Remicade; Schering-Plough SpA) was given at weeks 0, 2, and 6, and 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 hand improved dramatically two weeks later. Electromyography performed at week 22 after the start of therapy was normal. CDAI 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.

Caution with the use of cyclosporin in pregnancy

We read the article by Alstead and Nelson-Piercy with great interest.4 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 not well tolerated by 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-osal antibodies to initiate screening 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 endomyosal 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%).5 In this screening study, 9/12 diagnosed cases of CD ultimately had symptoms which could be attributed to CD (for example, anaemia or subtle gastrointestinal 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.6 If you look for CD you will find it.

References


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Reference


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.

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References

Author's reply

If I interpret Dr Sanders' position correctly, he favours population screening, provided that a case-finding approach is applied. His letter gives me the opportunity to expand further on my opinion on the appropriateness for coeliac disease (CD) population screening. As I mentioned in my final remarks and in the summary of my debate, while CD fulfils the criteria for mass screening, currently we lack the evidence based elements to justify a universal screening in European and North American populations. Therefore, my current position does not diverge substantially from that of Dr Sanders. I firmly believe that an “open-minded approach”, in which increased awareness and low threshold are applied to populations at risk, is ethical, logistic, and socially wise. This attitude towards screening was extremely effective in the USA, where the healthcare community had the perception that CD was extremely rare. We have recently subverted this wisdom by showing that the overall prevalence of CD in the USA is 1:133 in genetically based chronic diseases of human-kind. Therefore, there has been no better time and embrace new guidelines for CD mass screening.

Epidemiological data published worldwide suggest that CD is one of the most frequent genetically based chronic diseases of human-kind. There, therefore, has been no better time to establish the appropriateness for CD mass screening by performing well designed studies, rather than look in the opposite direction and ignore the problem. If we are not humble enough to embrace this approach to resolve this issue, we will not only be ethically and logistically incorrect, but also morally responsible for a poor outcome of our medical mission.

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References

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;51:877–80) comparing focal nodular hyperplasia (FNH) of the liver in men and women. The major findings of this 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 FNH size smaller (p=0.001) and more often performed (p<0.001) in men (n=18) than in women (n=216). Interestingly, perhaps because of the relatively small number of men (although very large in terms of the rare occurrence of FNH in men), no cases of multiple FNH were noted in the male population. We report here the case of 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. Transient changes of signet ring cell type in the stellate area in the largest lesion. In December 2002, he was in good health with unchanged hormonal treatment.

The patient received hormonal treatment and measurements 75 mm. Because there was no magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in our centre, ultrasound guided liver biopsy in both tumoral and non-tumoral liver areas was performed. The diagnosis of typical FNH was made in several of the lesions whereas non-tumoral liver was within the normal range. Liver Doppler ultrasonography disclosed multiple heterogeneously vascularized nodules with a hypoechoic pattern and without an arterial signal. Abdominal tomomodensitometry before and after contrast enhancement showed multiple lesions with rapid contrast enhancement during the arterial phase. The largest lesion was located between the left liver and segment IV and measured 75 mm.

This case report is unique in that there were multiple lesions in a man who had not received any previous treatments or portocaval shunt. Although from a literature search it is difficult to determine the exact number of men with multiple FNH lesions, the number appears probably very low. In this report, the discrepancy between normal bone scintigraphy and multiple liver lesions with the diagnosis of liver metastasis probable. Nevertheless, histological examination of several hepatic lesions, retrospective MRI, and outcome made the diagnosis of multiple FNH certain. This report, in common with the large series of Luciani et al, indicates that FNH diagnosis may be very difficult in men.

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Guidelines for colorectal 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 Associ- ation of Coloproctology of Great Britain and Ireland in commissioning guidelines for colorectal cancer screening in high risk groups (www.gutjnl.com). The absence of direct evidence from randomised trials for most of the groups, the various authors have balanced a wealth of recent genetic and epidemiological data navigat- ing an individual’s levels of elevated risk against the risks associated with screening. The end result is the recognition that within the label of “high risk” there are diverse levels of risks such that colonoscopic screening and surveillance must be tailored accordingly. This avoids the ineffective, costly, and potentially harmful “blanket-type” approach, which formerly prevailed.

However, within the guideline series, there is one exception—screening and surveillance in patients with acromegaly. We and other researchers have repeatedly stated that the studies undertaken by the authors of these guidelines have overestimated the risk of colorectal cancer in this patient group. They report a 13–14-fold increase in risk based on colorectal cancer detection rates among acromegalics compared with the general population. We compared with cancer rates from published series of colonoscopic screening in non-acromegalic subjects (see table 3 in Jenkins et al5). Their colorectal screening rates in mixed race US populations and lack data to permit age-sex comparisons. This simply does not rank as a well designed controlled study and the recommendations should not receive grade B status.

In the same manner as relative risks for those with relatives with colorectal cancer are estimated from population based data (sum- marised in Dunlop1), we have argued for a similar approach for patients with acromegaly. Based on three population based studies, we calculated (by fixed effects meta-analysis) a relative risk of 2.0 (95% confidence intervals 1.4–2.9) for colon and rectal cancer combined in acromegalic patients.5 Considered in terms of absolute risk, with an approximate 2% cumulative risk of colorectal cancer by age 70 years in the general UK population, the estimated risk in acromegalic patients would be 4%, hence the increase in colorectal risk in acromegalic patients would be 4.5% (10 of 222) —not a quarter if the estimate of a 13-fold increase was applied. Acromegalic patients thus have a modest colorectal cancer risk compared with other high risk. In first degree relatives with a strong family history (a high risk group), Dunlop5 recommends early colonoscopic screening and then wait until 53 years for repeat colonoscopy if initial screening is clear (the major- ity). How can Jenkins and Fairclough justify early screening and colonoscopy five yearly thereafter in all of their acromegalics?

Atkin and Saunders have demonstrated that colonoscopic surveillance following ini- tial screening in the non-acromegalic popula- tion is determined primarily by clinicopatho- logical findings. These basic guidelines must also be applied to the acromegalic patient population. Jenkins and Fairclough have stated that elevated serum IGF-I levels may predict for recurrent adenomas in acromegalic patients and “should be offered screening at three year intervals”. This is based on data from only eight acromegalics with recurrent adenomas and should not replace other well recognised predictors of recur- rence.

Looking at the context of (other high risk) groups, the guidelines for colorectal cancer screening in patients with acromegaly are inconsistent. The aggressive approach to...
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We thank Dr Renehan and colleagues for their comments on our data, which they have also questioned.

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

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

I agree that LIFE and MB remain controversial and applaud the authors for publication of their experience. Given the limitations 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.

We are aware of at least 12 other prospective controlled studies. We do not regard a single study as having a significantly increased relevance if a cancer is already known. The promise or passess of new techniques to the increased survival associated with the early detection of cancer under 45 years.

References

Transrectal 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 thrombosis in the pathogenesis of ischaemic colitis. 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 methylene-ethenotetrahydrofolate reductase polymorphism, and the G20210A prothrombin gene mutation were not studied in both patients whereas in the second case even the very important factor V Leiden mutation as well as lupus anticoagulant and homocysteine levels were not evaluated. Although the aeroplane flight could be the most important risk factor in these cases, the rather incomplete thrombophilic screening does not permit us to conclude that it was “the only potential risk factor.”

It is known that deep vein thrombosis (mainly symptomless) may occur in up to 10% of long haul airline travellers. In contrast, hypercoagulable states suggest a possible role in ischaemic colitis, leading to the development of thrombotic occlusion of the small vessels supplying the colon. In a recent study of comprehensive thrombophilic screening in patients with an established diagnosis of ischaemic colitis, we found the prevalence of acquired and hereditary thrombotic risk factors significantly higher compared with the prevalence of these factors in matched inflammatory and healthy controls. A thrombophilic tendency was demonstrated in the majority of patients and the most significant associations were with antiphospholipid antibodies and with the factor V Leiden mutation. Moreover, we recently found a high frequency of protein Z deficiency in patients with ischaemic colitis (unpublished data). Based on the recent data of the association of protein Z deficiency mainly with arterial thrombosis, protein Z deficiency may be involved in the development of the disease in a subgroup of patients by causing thrombosis in the small mesenteric arteries.

The presence of hypercoagulable states suggests a possible role of
venous obstruction. It is possible that future identification of subgroups in ischaemic colitis patients with sophisticated imaging techniques could distinguish cases with arterial or venous ischaemia. In conclusion, we suggest that the mechanism of ischaemic colitis is multifactorial. Acquired and genetic factors may interact, leading to disease manifestation. Arrhythmia and embolic conditions, as well as long haul flights may play a role in genetically predisposed individuals in the disease pathogenesis.

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References

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 gastrointestinal mucosal injury, repair, and therapeutics.

The book is not a compilation of talks given at a conference but rather an honest attempt to inform and stimulate research areas 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 emphasis of the book is on the use of experimental cell culture and animal models and, therefore, 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 in-depth reviews of a particular area, such as the role of cytokines and angiogenic growth factors in gastrointestinal repair.

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-meaning research reported. Most doctors have had little or no training in research methods, despite having completed an MD. There might be one reason why it is becoming increasingly difficult for even research experienced clinicians 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 newer strictures and disciplines, this should be left to the professional 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 will progress if the answer, even if only in hope, is yes, but this will require a greater familiarity with research methodology, the patience to plan thoughtfully, and with experienced experts.

This handbook provides definitions and contemporary examples. It provides recent references from major journals and is well illustrated. It contains material beyond explanations of research terminology and methodology including the new requirements for the Research Ethics Committees, and the EU Clinical Trials directive. Many important issues are fast moving; in the UK there is a single electronic ethics application form now with new rules regarding consent for multicentre
Hepatology Principles and Practice

E Kunz, H-D Kunz. Berlin: Springer Verlag, colour, pp 825. ISBN 3540 42161 0

“You have a very large parcel”, Zeinab, 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 want to know whether I 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 place, 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 Kunz 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 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 nonexistent 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, given 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 “users’ 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 Kunz 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, Zeinab has decided to check the strength of her newly reinforced shelves by clearing a space in anticipation of her copy.

P Hungin

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: acgbi@acgbi.org.uk; website: www.acgbi.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 46 152 356; email: torkel.wadstrom@nmbu.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, Leivenweberstr. 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

XII Falk Liver Week

The XII Falk Liver Week, in honour of Hans Poppert’s 100th birthday, will be held on 15–22 October 2003 in Freiburg, Germany. Further details - see Falk Symposia above.

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 Haut-Kœnis 322, Brussels 1000, Belgium. Tel: +32 (0) 266 07 60; fax: +32 (0) 266 354; email: straeb.asmb@proximedia.be; website: www.straeb-asmb.com

Hong Kong-Shanghai International Liver Congress 2004

This meeting, on Helicobacter infections and gastroduodenal pathology, will be held on 3–6 September 16, 2003 by guest. Protected by copyright.