Letters

Pitfalls in diagnosing acute pancreatitis

We thank Jolobe for his letter (Gut 2005;54:1207–8) which mentions the difficulty of establishing the diagnosis of acute pancreatitis in patients with diabetic ketoacidosis. We did not address diagnostic tests and medical intensive care treatment of acute pancreatitis in our article,1 but reviewed the interventional and surgical treatment strategies in acute pancreatitis. There is no doubt that treatment of acute pancreatitis, including organ failure in its early phase, is solely dependent on early and correct diagnosis.

According to the latest classification from Atlanta,2 acute pancreatitis is an acute inflammatory process of the pancreas with variable involvement of other regional tissues or remote organ systems. From a clinical point of view, acute upper abdominal pain and elevated pancreatic enzyme levels are needed to diagnose acute pancreatitis. As pointed out by Jolobe in his letter, acute pancreatitis is still underdiagnosed under certain clinical conditions, including diabetic ketoacidosis, but also in other clinical situations, such as shock of unknown origin, patients under intensive care treatment, as well as rare causes of the disease. As acute pancreatitis can be associated with diabetic ketoacidosis and the association between these two is a two way cause-and-effect relationship, early imaging of the pancreas is recommended in these patients to establish the correct diagnosis.

Our article focused on the surgical and interventional treatment of severe acute pancreatitis.

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References


Severe recurrent Crohn’s disease of the ileocolonic anastomosis disappearing completely with antibiotic therapy

Intestinal bacteria play an important role in the pathogenesis of Crohn’s disease, which occurs at sites with the highest concentrations of bacteria. Adherent invasive Escherichia coli associate with the ileal mucosa in Crohn’s disease,1 and E coli, Bacteroides, and fusiform bacteria are associated with early disease recurrence after surgical resection.2 The incidence of clinical recurrence is approximately 90% at three years, with the risk higher in smokers than non-smokers. Endoscopic recurrence occurs in 73–90% of patients one year after surgery, and clinical disease correlates reasonably well with the endoscopic severity of disease. Postoperative prophylaxis therapies are unsatisfactory. Mesalazine 3 g daily, 6-mercaptopurine 50 mg daily, and azathioprine 2 mg/kg daily are only slightly more effective than placebo.3 Antimicrobial agents have demonstrated efficacy in postoperative prophylaxis reducing the recurrence at the ileocolonic anastomosis. Metronidazole reduced severe endoscopic recurrence at three months and reduced clinical relapse at one year, but was poorly tolerated with significant nausea and vomiting.4 Ornidazole 1 g daily for one year postoperatively reduced severe endoscopic and clinical recurrence at one year but not at two or three years.5 We report a case of severe recurrent ileoileal disease successfully treated with combination ciprofloxacin and metronidazole. A 23 year old man with a three month history of abdominal pain and diarrhoea was diagnosed with Crohn’s disease in October 1996 after a small bowel series revealed narrowing and ulceration of the distal 10 cm of the terminal ileum. His symptoms were steroid responsive for two years. Colonoscopy in June 1998 for recurrent abdominal pain showed severe ulceration and stenosis of the ileocaecal valve and with his symptoms unresponsive to corticosteroids he underwent surgical resection of a segment of severe fistulising terminal ileal Crohn’s disease. The remaining small bowel appeared normal. Histopathology confirmed severe active cicatrizing Crohn’s disease, with stenosis and gross wall thickening with a cobblestone appearance. He made an uncomplicated recovery and remained well without medication. Follow up colonoscopy in April 1999 demonstrated minor recurrent Crohn’s disease affecting one third of the ileocolonic anastomosis. He commenced metronidazole 400 mg daily, and on colonoscopy in March 2000 had severe inflammation and narrowing of the entire circumference of the ileocolonic anastomosis preventing ileal intubation. Ciprofloxacin 750 mg twice daily was added to the metronidazole. Colonoscopy in August 2001 showed superficial ulceration of less than one third of the anastomosis, minimal narrowing, and a normal neoterminal ileum and colon. He continued metronidazole 400 mg daily and ciprofloxacin 750 mg alternate daily until January 2003 when colonoscopy demonstrated a normal anastomosis, neoterminal ileum, and colon. The patient remained on ciprofloxacin 750 mg twice weekly and metronidazole was ceased. Colonoscopy 12 months later showed very minimal ulceration affecting one third of the anastomosis, no significant narrowing, and a normal neoterminal ileum.

Ciprofloxacin, a fluoroquinolone, is effective against intestinal aerobic Gram negative bacteria such as E coli, Shigella, Salmonella, and clostridial species. It is well tolerated even with prolonged use6 but can cause hepatotoxicity and tendon fragility. In Crohn’s disease trials, ciprofloxacin was superior to placebo in decreasing the Crohn’s disease activity index in one study7 but ciprofloxacin and metronidazole in combination with budesonide showed no benefit over placebo and budesonide. However, subgroup analysis of this study revealed a clear improvement in the antibiotic treated group with Crohn’s colitis.8 To our knowledge, this is the first report of antibiotic therapy producing complete endoscopic resolution of severe postoperative recurrence at the ileocolonic anastomosis. This patient has remained well, and has not developed any untoward side effects. We believe a controlled trial should be performed to test whether low dose ciprofloxacin alone or in combination can prevent recurrence of Crohn’s disease at the ileocolonic anastomosis.

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References


A new entity of hereditary colorectal cancer

Mueller-Koch et al. in describe clinical and molecular evidence for a “new entity” of hereditary colorectal cancer (CRC). Clustering of CRC within families has been known for some time and it is not surprising that some such families will meet the Amsterdam criteria (AC) even though they do not carry a germline mutation in a DNA mismatch repair gene. It has been demonstrated previously that AC positive families without evidence of a DNA mismatch repair defect do not show either the clinical or pathological features of the hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer/Lynch syndrome. With respect to CRC, differences extend to multiplicity, anatomical site, histopathology, and DNA ploidy status. With respect to colorectal adenomas, these are more frequent but less advanced in AC positive families in which there is no evidence of a DNA mismatch repair defect. More recently it has been shown that the differences extend to the risks of developing both CRC and extracolonic cancer. The fundamental issue is whether it is reasonable to continue to use the limited set of clinical features that comprise the AC as a diagnostic label when there is clear evidence that families that meet the AC are clinically heterogeneous.

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References


Figure 1. Effect of aged garlic extract (AGE) on DNA fragmentation in methotrexate (MTX) treated IEC-6 cells. IEC-6 cells were treated with various concentrations of MTX and AGE for 72 h. DNA was extracted and subjected to agarose gel electrophoresis. Experiments were repeated three times with similar results.
Conflict of interest: None declared.

References


Tuberculous colitis

With great interest we read the tutorial by Forbes (Gut 2005; 54:1156). We would like to stress that the count of CD4 lymphocytes (and possibly immunoglobulins) might be quite helpful in the differential diagnosis of chronic inflammatory bowel disease and tuberculosis, as evidenced by the following case report.

A 35 year old Iranian patient presented to our clinic with chronic diarrhoea, intermittent abdominal pain, and a 10 kg weight loss over the last four months. The right lower abdomen was slightly tender at physical examination. Routine laboratory tests revealed hypochromic microcytic anaemia, an elevated erythrocyte sedimentation rate (88 mm in the first hour), and a low serum albumin of 25 g/l (normal range 35–50). Multiple ulcers with signs of scarring were detected by colonoscopy in the distal ascending colon (fig 1A).

Histological examination of biopsy specimens disclosed granulomatous disease of the ascending colon (fig 1B) but normal mucosa in the more distal colon and rectum. Despite a normal peripheral leucocyte count, peripheral CD4 lymphocytes had decreased to 17/µl (normal range 400–1800).

Human immunodeficiency virus infection was excluded. However, the tuberculin test was positive, and Ziehl-Neelsen staining demonstrated acid fast bacilli in colonic biopsies (fig 1C). The left lung showed some pleural scarring on chest x-ray. Ultrasound revealed slight pericardial effusion as well as some ascites. Antitubercular chemotherapy was initiated, and non-resistant Mycobacterium tuberculosis was finally cultured from peritoneal biopsies (fig 1C). The left lung showed some pleural scarring on chest x-ray. Ultrasound revealed slight pericardial effusion as well as some ascites.

Mycobacterium tuberculosis was finally cultured from peritoneal biopsies (fig 1C). The left lung showed some pleural scarring on chest x-ray. Ultrasound revealed slight pericardial effusion as well as some ascites.

Antimicrobial improvement and remained off all antisecretory medications, and a year later the patient is well, with a normal peripheral CD4 lymphocyte count.

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Endocinch treatment for GORD: where it stands

We read with great interest the article by Schierke and colleagues (Gut 2005; 54:752–8) on the long term failure of endoscopic gastroplasty (Endocinch). The authors reported more than 80% of patients had lost at least one suture and only 17% had all sutures in situ after 18 months (clip device). Loss of plications has been reported both with knot1 as well as clip devices (Gut 2005; 54:752–8) used for anchoring sutures but seems to be more with the later. Further studies are needed to confirm above. However, a previous study did not find a significant difference between the mean tensile failure force (tissue tear out and suture disruption) for the knot compared with the clip device anchoring technique.2 The depth of a suture seems to be an important factor in the durability of a suture. With the present size of a suction chamber in a sewing capsule after an appropriate suction an average depth of a suture would be 2.86±0.91 mm.3 This enable placement of most of the sutures in the submucosal layer of the stomach and some sutures may enter the muscular wall. Hence increasing the size of the suction chamber may increase the depth of suture, which may improve the durability of sutures.

The procedure has been followed up for 1–4 years in other published series. At one year of follow up, the marked improvement in gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) symptoms, quality of life, and reduced requirements for proton pump inhibitors (PPIs) using the Endocinch technique is associated with some continuing oesophageal acid reflux.4,5 Those patients who did not revert to PPIs at 12 months had a significantly lower degree of acid reflux at three months than those who went back on PPIs. The reason why some patients went back on PPIs is unclear but it may relate to the higher DeMeester score in this group pre-procedure.6 Two years post-procedure follow up (n = 33) from the US multicentre study revealed a sustained significant improvement in symptom score and regurgitation. Twenty five percent were completely off antisecretory medication and 26% were requiring less than or equal to half of their initial PPI/H2 blockers.7 In the paediatric group at 33 months postprocedure, 82% maintained their symptomatic improvement and remained off all antireflux medications.8 Most patients with good improvement maintain their improvement at 2–4 years.9 A non-randomised comparison study between Endocinch and the gold standard laparoscopic Nissen fundoplication (LNF) revealed significant reduction in symptom and regurgitation score, requirement for antisecretory medications, and improved quality of life in both groups. However, physiological control of acid reflux was significantly better in the LNF group at the expense of a higher incidence of postprocedure dysphagia and difficulty in vomiting and belching.10
Better outcome shown by Thomson and colleagues in respect of symptom improvement and oesophageal pH control was probably due to better suture technique and may have provided a relaxed and safer environment for taking deeper stitches. Also, they took three as compared with two plications in all other Endocinch studies. Hence further studies are necessary to determine what modifications to this technique are required in order to produce the maximum clinical benefit and to prevent complications associated with GORD. At this stage in its development it is important that medical practitioners using Endocinch should enter their results into formal trials to assess and improve its efficacy and durability. Nevertheless, the Endocinch technique has added a new and exciting era which has the potential to improve the quality of life of patients with GORD.

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References

PM2S mutations in childhood cancer
We refer to the recent paper by Durno et al “Family history and molecular features of children, adolescents, and young adults with colorectal carcinoma” (Gut 2005;54:1146–50). Among other patients with early onset colorectal cancer (CRC), the authors discuss a girl with CRC onset at the age of 12 years, and a subsequent second primary tumour (glioblastoma). This patient appears to be the sister of a male Turcot syndrome patient described in 1995. However, although referred to in the discussion, she was not explicitly stated to carry the same PMS2 mutation (R134X) as her brother, and so whether her mutation was assumed or verified by Durno et al is unclear.

More importantly, the authors have overlooked the fact that both of these siblings have since been shown to be compound heterozygotes for the PMS2 mutations R134X and 2184deTC. The fact that these patients have gastrointestinal symptoms on both alleles offers an explanation for the earlier observation of a high degree of microsatellite instability (MSI) in their constitutional DNA, not just in tumour DNA.

We have previously pointed out that in the childhood cancer families so far described, PMS2 mutations behave recessively, the parents of the homozygous or compound heterozygous patients being, by and large, tumour free.

While other recent publications do suggest that heterozygous PMS2 mutations can pre-dispose to CRC, these mutations appear, for unknown reasons, to be less penetrant than “classical” hereditary non-polyposis colorectal cancer alleles of, for example, MLH1 or MSS2. Certainly, on the present evidence, a heterozygous PMS2 mutation is unlikely to account for a childhood cancer presentation.

Indeed, given that one of the other cases described by Durno et al was also homozygous for an MLH1 mutation, we would like to emphasize again that a childhood (as opposed to adult) presentation of CRC or other MSI positive tumour should signal the possibility of a familial mismatch repair defect. Demonstration of MSI in constitutional DNA would in such circumstances point directly to the likelihood of biallelic mutation of one of the mismatch repair genes, with important implications for genetic management.

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References


Epithelial cells in bone marrow: do they matter? We read with great interest the letter of Steiner et collegues (Gut 2005;54:1045–6). They described disseminated epithelial cells in the bone marrow of patients with colorectal adenomas. As adenomas are non-cancerous, it is questionable whether these epithelial-like cells really represent cancer cells. If so, the benign nature of intraepithelial neoplasia is basically challenged.

The search for micrometastatic disease in the bone marrow of cancer patients is an intriguing field in which many different diagnostic molecular modalities are being explored. However, the clinical impact of bone marrow micrometastatic disease is not clear. Patients with breast cancer who develop clinically manifest bone marrow metastases and in these patients detection of this type of micrometastatic disease has been shown to have prognostic impact. In gastrointestinal cancer, however, relatively rarely develop overt bone marrow metastases and also the clinical impact of the detection of bone marrow micrometastases in these patients is less clear.

We studied the impact of bone marrow micrometastases in patients with oesophageal adenocarcinoma and encountered a concern which might be relevant for the interpretation of the conflicting findings, as described by Steiner et al. We obtained bone marrow samples of 20 patients who underwent a potentially curative oesophagectomy for oesophageal adenocarcinoma. Cytospins of these samples were stained with Ber-EP4 (Dako, Hamburg, Germany) and A45-B/B3 (Micromet, Munich, Germany) using the alkaline phosphatase-anti-alkaline phosphatase technique. In this series we found positive staining for these epithelial markers in four (20%) and five (25%) of the patients for Ber-EP4 and A45-B/B3, respectively. As a negative control group we obtained a bone marrow sample in 20 patients who underwent cardiac surgery and had no known cancerous disease. In this control group, to our surprise, we found positive stainings in three (15%) and four (20%) patients for Ber-EP4 and A45-B/B3, respectively. Positive staining in the bone marrow of patients with no known cancerous disease indicates that such results should be interpreted with caution and that these cells do not necessarily represent micrometastatic disease.

Many groups have studied micrometastatic disease for which many different detection methods have been used. Studies that have examined negative control patients have also reported positive bone marrow staining for Ber-EP4 cells in up to 10% of patients. One study focused on the detection of Ber-EP4-positive cells in the bone marrow samples of colorectal cancer patients with bone marrow metastases and in the bone marrow of patients with colorectal adenomas. The authors found an increased frequency of Ber-EP4-positive cells in patients with bone marrow metastases compared to patients without bone marrow metastases. It is uncertain whether these cells are truly metastatic cells or whether they represent benign cells. The latter possibility is supported by the observation that Ber-EP4-positive cells were also found in patients without bone marrow metastases. Therefore, the clinical significance of Ber-EP4-positive cells in the bone marrow of patients with colorectal cancer is still uncertain.

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et al, the cells do not have the morphological aspect of a tumour cell and also in other papers on micrometastases, morphology of the cells is not taken into account. In our data set, we could not detect cells in the bone marrow cytospins which had the morphological aspect of a tumour cell.

With current techniques, epithelial-like cells can be isolated in the bone marrow of many patients not known to have cancer. Probably these cells have no clinical relevance in patients with adenomas. In future studies, more attention should be paid to the morphological criteria of the cells.

Conflict of interest: None declared.

References


Symptomatic eosinophilic gastritis cured with Helicobacter pylori eradication

Eosinophilic gastritis is a disorder of unknown aetiology, characterised by eosinophil infiltration of the gastric and intestinal mucosa and peripheral eosinophilia. To date, only two cases have reported the coexistence of Helicobacter pylori gastritis and eosinophilic gastritis. In none of these cases was a causal association between these two entities documented. 1, 2 We present a case of eosinophilic gastritis cured with H pylori eradication therapy.

A 44 year old woman presented with a two month history of vomiting, nausea, and crampy abdominal pain. Her past medical history included idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura, splenectomy at the age of 11 years, hypertension, diabetes mellitus type II, and depression. Her medication included valsartan, atenolol, nifedipine, glitazides, metformin hydrochloride, indapamide, and venlafaxine hydrochloride. No food allergy or intolerance was reported.

She lived on a Greek island and did not smoke or drink alcohol. Physical examination revealed only mild diffuse epigastric and abdominal tenderness, and no signs of systemic vasculitis or connective tissue disease were present. Laboratory evaluation revealed a white blood cells count of 14 900 cells/mm$^3$ (normal 4000–10 000) with an eosinophilic count of 2680 cells/mm$^3$ (normal 0–800), and a normal platelet count (187 000/mm$^3$) and haemoglobin level (12.8 g/dl). Serum creatinine was 158 mg/dl (normal 70–105), alanine aminotransferase 38 μmol/l (normal 10–28), γ-glutamyl transferase 44 μmol/l (normal 5–30), erythrocyte sedimentation rate 9 mm, and C reactive protein 9.19 mg/l (normal 0.00–6.00). Stool studies for ova and parasites and stool cultures were negative. Thyroid function tests, serum IgE, abdominal ultrasounds, and computed tomography scan were normal. No findings of extra-abdominal malignancy were evident. Colonoscopy with terminal ileoscopy was normal, as was histology of the ileum and colon. Gastroscopy showed small erosions at the corpus, the antral mucosa, and the duodenal bulb. Biopsies were taken from the gastric corpus, antrum, and from the second part of the duodenum. Gastric biopsies showed H pylori infection and dense eosinophilic infiltration (29 eosinophils per high power field) of the gastric mucosa, but biopsies from the second-third parts of the duodenum were normal.

She was discharged with a diagnosis of eosinophilic gastritis and H pylori erosive gastritis, and was treated with esomeprazole (40 mg/day), amoxycillin (1 g/day), and clarithromycin (1 g/day), and clazide, metformin hydrochloride, indapamide, and sulphasalazine for symptoms of gastroenteritis and eosinophilic gastritis. Eosinophilic gastritis was cured with H pylori eradication which showed no histological signs of H pylori infection.

Our patient was diagnosed with ulcerative colitis at the age of 25 years. Her first baby was delivered by Cesarean section prematurely at 29 weeks gestation. Frequent flare ups of her pancolitis required repeated steroid rescue and she was soon started on azathioprine. Unfortunately, she was unable to tolerate purine analogues due to heterozygous thiopurine methyltransferase deficiency causing severe pancytopenia and life threatening sepsis.

When weaning off tacrolimus resulted in repeated disease flare ups, she underwent granulocyte apheresis (Adacolumn) at age 27 years but was unable to attain prolonged remission without tacrolimus.

At the age of 31 years she became intentionally pregnant with her second child. Sonographic malformation screening during the second trimester did not detect any fetal abnormalities. She spontaneously delivered a healthy baby girl (Apagar score 9/10/10; birth weight 3500 g; height 51 cm) at 40 weeks gestation. She was continued on tacrolimus throughout the pregnancy and following delivery, aiming for serum trough levels of 4–6 ng/ml, and maintaining remission. To date she is 33 years old and still in remission. Because of the unknown immediate and long term side effects of tacrolimus in the newborn, we recommended refraining from breastfeeding in the newborn, and she tolerated breastfeeding with a healthy baby girl (Apagar score 9/10/10; birth weight 3500 g; height 51 cm) at 40 weeks gestation. She was continued on tacrolimus throughout the pregnancy and following delivery. Most experience with tacrolimus in pregnancy exists with transplant patients. In a recent study, 37 female liver transplant recipients who delivered 49 babies were reported. Thirty six mothers (97%) survived the pregnancy. One patient was managed with intra-aortic arterial graft during labour died. The mean gestational period was 36.4±3.2 weeks, excluding two premature transplants.
delivers at 23 and 24 weeks' gestation. Twenty two babies (46.9%) were delivered by Caesarean section. One baby, who was born premature, a mother with Alagille syndrome, died from congenital birth defects. Preterm delivery and low birth weight were in the same range as seen in all solid organ transplant patients under any form of immunosuppression. The results for 13 kidney transplant and simultaneous kidney-pancreas transplant mothers were similar. In an older survey of 100 pregnancies in 84 mothers from multiple centres, 71 pregnancies progressed to delivery (68 live births, two neonatal deaths, and one stillbirth), 24 were terminated (12 spontaneous and 12 induced), two pregnancies were ongoing, and three were lost to follow up. Preterm delivery occurred in 41% and low birth weight in 10% of patients. Four neonates presented with malformations without any consistent pattern. Tacrolimus is excreted into human milk, nursing is discouraged because of potential short term and long term toxicity due to immature metabolism of tacrolimus in the neonate. However, one uncomplicated case with breastfeeding under tacrolimus has been published. Based on the experience in the transplant population and this case, the use of tacrolimus in pregnancy may be justified under special circumstances in carefully selected non-transplant patients. Unlike in her first pregnancy, our patient was able to deliver a full term healthy baby girl vaginally after an uneventful pregnancy, maintaining sustained remission of her ulcerative colitis.

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References

First case of paralytic intestinal ileus after double balloon enteroscopy

Double balloon enteroscopy is a new method allowing the exploration of the whole intestine by the oral or anal route, with the possibility of endoscopic intervention. We describe here the first case of enduring paralytic ileus following this technique.

Case report

A 47 old woman was referred to our unit for chronic and obscure undiagnosed gastrointestinal bleeding. Unremarkable conventional upper and lower endoscopies were performed twice. Small bowel follow through studies, abdominal computed tomography (CT), and pushed enteroscopy were also normal. A capsule enteroscopy was performed showing three angiodysplasias in the distal jejunum, all measuring 2–3 mm. To reach them, we performed a double balloon enteroscopy which showed two of the three lesions. Electrocoagulation with an argon plasma coagulator (30 W, 1.5 J/min) was performed on both lesions. Twelve uneventful hours followed the procedure, after which nausea and vomiting occurred. Abdominal examination showed abdominal meteorism with diffuse moderate pain and no focal tenderness. No fever or other clinical signs apart from those of intestinal occlusion were observed. An abdominal CT showed localised and moderate dilation of a few intestinal loops with normal proximal and distal ileum (fig 1). No complications such as pneumoperitoneum, ascensis, intestinal haemorrhage, or haematoma following the procedure, indicating isolated motility impairment. Indeed, plasma argon coagulation is not known to induce an ileus lasting seven days without other complications.

Therefore, it could be that the ileus was caused by the double balloon technique itself due to the pronounced stretching of the small bowel and possibly the mesentry. Secondly, it should be emphasised that conservative medical management should be tried first, and that treatment may include prokinetic agents such as erythromycin which improve motility impairment disorders.

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References
EDITOR’S QUIZ: GI SNAPSHOT

Answer

From question on page 1817
Rectoscopy showed a rectal stricture (white arrow), 3 cm cephalic to the dentate line, a rectal ulcer (blue arrow) (fig 1), and a rectovaginal fistula (yellow arrow) (fig 2), through which the vagina was visualised (black arrow) (fig 3). She was treated surgically. A diagnosis of rectovaginal fistula (RVF) secondary to anorectal supposities was retained as no other aetiology was found.

In the past 20 years there have been several cases of “anorectal ergotism” which were reported as protritus, rectal ulcerations, rectal stenosis, and rarely RVF.1,2

Because anorectal ergot acts on the arterial and venous tree of the capillaries, local rather than systemic damage is more likely to be seen with suppository use.3 Ischaemia induced by vasoconstriction leads to local inflammation (“anorectal ergotism”) which may lead to RVF that can easily occur because the vagina and rectum are separated by a thin septum. Normally, anorectal ergotism resolves after discontinuation of the drug. Only rectal stricture and RVF have to be treated endoscopically or surgically.

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