Benefit of folic acid supplementation in parkinsonian patients treated with levodopa

We read with interest the article by Paulig and coworkers (Neurology 2002;72:567–71). The authors demonstrated a significant influence of levodopa treatment over 12 hours on homocysteine concentration, with a significant increase in treated patients compared with untreated controls. The authors concluded that homocysteine supplementation might be beneficial. We would like to comment on the importance of the increase in homocysteine levels, which may reflect increased oxidative stress and in turn induce endothelial dysfunction. Homocysteine induces endothelial dysfunction which may further promote atherosclerotic disease in striatal cerebral vessels with subsequent onset of differential susceptibility to impaired energy metabolism, oxidative stress, and basal ganglia dysfunction. Endothelial response to homocysteine is partly dependent on the availability of nitric oxide. Exposure of the endothelium to homocysteine induces release of nitric oxide, a further excitotoxic compound under suspicion for the contribution of the ensuing neurodegeneration in PD.

1. Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate or S-methyl- 
2. 2-mercaptopyrimidinogen acts with S-adenosylmethionine (SAM), which increases metabolism of homocysteine to methionine, or, hypothetically, application of peripherally acting COMT inhibitors as adjunct to levodopa/DDI treatment. Methionine acts in combination with pyridoxalphosphate-5’-phosphate or S-methyl-2-keto-butyric acid as a strong scavenger of reactive oxygenants, which, in turn induce endothelial dysfunction. Homocysteine supplementation may provide a therapeutic benefit by decreasing homocysteine levels, which support onset of vascular disease, which may also cause by drugs, for example, levodopa.

3. Homocysteine supplementation in levodopa treated patients may show an improvement in the dysphagia after neurosurgery suggesting that Chiari I was the cause of the patient’s bulbar palsies.

Dysphagia with predominant signs of lower motor neuron disease as the sole manifestation of adult Chiari I malformation is unusual. Pressure exerted by the cerebellar tonsils may cause on the hypoglossal nuclei other swallowing centres located in the medulla is hypothesised by the authors to be a main cause of the dysphagia. The importance of the reported case was the appearance of tongue atrophy over a relatively short period of time. In the three patients with dysphagia as the sole manifestation of Chiari I reported to date, the complaint had been present for at least three and a half years and none of the patients had tongue atrophy.

We would like to comment on the importance of homocysteine as a risk factor for vascular disease. The objective of our follow-up study was to determine total plasma homocysteine in 212 levodopa treated and 29 previously untreated PD patients and 110 controls. Standardised measurement of total homocysteine plasma concentrations with high performance liquid chromatography was only performed in subjects with no metabolic disturbances, like diabetes mellitus, hypertension, reduced levels of vitamin B6, cobalamin and/or folic acid or neurological diseases other than PD. Each PD patient fasted and was withdrawn from drug treatment for at least 12 hours before taking blood samples in the morning. All participants gave informed consent, the local ethical committee approved this study. Homocysteine levels were significantly (analysis of covariance F (1, 210) = 5.4, p = 0.02) higher in levodopa/DDI treated PD patients: p = 0.005; previously untreated PD patients compared with controls: p = 0.38). Increase in homocysteine concentration was associated with a decreased need for levodopa.

References


Dysphagia due to Chiari I malformation mimicking ALS

We read with interest the article by Paulig and Prosiegel concerning a patient initially diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), who had suffered from progressive swallowing difficulties, fibrillations, and tongue atrophy for a year, in the context of a flaccid bulbar palsy. Brain and spinal MRI showed a Chiari I malformation with descent of the cerebellar tonsils. The authors accompanied their article with an illustration of the patient, showing extensive bilateral paresis and atrophy of the tongue. The article notes the importance of carrying out an MRI examination on those patients who show bulbar palsy mimicking bulbar onset type ALS in order to rule out Chiari I malformation.

Chiari I malformation has also recently been reported as being associated with bulbar onset ALS. Nevertheless, the marked improvement in the dysphagia after neurosurgery suggests that Chiari I was the cause of the patient’s bulbar palsies.

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**High dose intravenous immune globulin in the treatment of hereditary recurrent brachial plexus neuropathy**

We read with interest the article by Klein et al providing pathological evidence that the neuropathic attacks in hereditary brachial plexus neuropathy (HBPN) are secondary to an inflammatory process. As a possible pathogenetic mechanism the authors suggest altered immune modulation. In the absence of controlled clinical trials they treated patients with intravenous methyl prednisolone. This treatment—in their experience—reduced the symptoms, particularly the pain, for a brief time, but as they tapered the corticosteroid dose the signs and symptoms reappeared. The authors concluded that in some cases of HBPN an inflammatory response arising from an immune dysfunction in the brachial plexus and upper limb nerves causes nerve abnormalities and axonal degeneration. Treatments of this immune modulation may therefore be useful in the management of HBPN.

To further support the immunological pathogenesis we describe a 13-year-old girl who since childhood had suffered from recurrent episodes of severe asymmetric pain and weakness of the shoulder and arm involving the same as well as the opposite side. Her father had similar attacks and genetic testing for hereditary neuropathy with liability to pressure palsy was negative. At the age of 4 years the girl experienced severe left shoulder pain that lasted for a week. She was treated with corticosteroids. Three years later, a left deltoid muscle hypotrophy was still present. At the age of 11 years she had a similar episode associated with marked weakness of left upper limb and arm and was treated with non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. The shoulder pain improved in four weeks but muscle strength recovered only after about four months. We observed the girl during a further episode that occurred in July 2002: she complained of severe neck pain that lasted for one day then spontaneously disappeared. One week later she suddenly experienced severe neck and right shoulder pain and mild weakness of the right limb girdle. The neurological examination disclosed bilateral hypotrophy and weakness of the deltoids, secondary to previous episodes, and mild weakness of right subscapular and both spinates muscles. Tendon jerks were absent in the upper limbs. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the cervical spinal cord yielded normal findings. MRI scans of the brachial plexus and shoulder muscles showed mild abnormalities in the supraspinatus muscle. The cerebrospinal fluid examination disclosed 38 mononuclear cells/mm³ (38/mm³) feature of an increase in the CSF mononuclear cell count and no oligoclonal bands were present. Neuroupsychiological tests showed a mild reduction in the amplitude of the compound motor action potential elicited by both axillary and musculocutaneous nerve; the right median nerve sensory action potential was abnormally small and the F wave was delayed. Needle EMG found no denervation. The standard neuroimmunological screening (anti-GMI, -GM2, -GD1a, -GD1b, -sulfatide, -MAG IgM antibodies) was normal. Because the previous episode failed to respond to corticosteroid treatment, and considering the severity of the episode, the lengthy period needed for a partial recovery in previous episodes, the severity of the patient’s pain, her young age, and the muscular atrophy, we started treatment with intravenous immunoglobulin (IGG Siena N.IV, Siena, Italy; 0.4 g/kg/day for five days). After two days of IV Ig treatment the patient reported a dramatic reduction of pain and a progressive improvement in muscle strength. One week after the onset of treatment the complete clinical recovery and no muscle atrophy developed. Two months after the treatment stopped she is still asymptomatic.

The case reported here has two potentially important implications. Firstly, the epineural mononuclear cell infiltrates observed by Klein et al in nerve biopsy specimens, the presence of mononuclear cells in our patient’s CSF, and her response to IV Ig together strongly support an immune mediated inflammation in the pathogenesis of HBPN. Among others, possible mechanisms underlying the efficacy of IV Ig in HBPN include attenuation of complement mediated damage, induction of anti-inflammatory cytokines, inhibition of endothelial cell activation, regulation of help T cell cytokine production, and neutralisation of T cell superantigens. Secondly, individual episodes of HBPN are indistinguishable from Parsonage-Turner syndrome and pain can be very severe for weeks. Complete recovery from each episode is frequent although cumulative disability may develop. Although Klein et al proposed corticosteroid treatment, others reported that this treatment produces no definite improvement. Also our patient in a previous episode had no benefit from corticosteroid treatment. The rapid benefit and the long term efficacy of IV Ig in our patient suggest that episodes may be that should be treated with this drug. To our knowledge this is the first report of a patient treated with IV Ig. The encouraging results prompt controlled therapeutic trials at least for patients with subforms of HBPN and possibly even for those with Parsonage-Turner syndrome.

A. Priori

Department of Clinical Neurology and Neurophysiology, IRCCS Ospedale Maggiore di Milano, University of Milan, Via F. Sforza, 35 Milano, 20122 Italy

Correspondence to: Professor A Priori; alberto.priori@unimi.it

**References**


Autonomic failure. A textbook of clinical disorders of the autonomic nervous system, 4th edition

Edited by Christopher J Mathias and Sir Roger Bannister (Pp 562, £70.00). Published by Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2002. ISBN 0 19 262850 X

The concept of autonomic disorders or dysfunction is an uncomfortable one for neurologists and as such remains poorly understood and managed within neurology. Part of this problem is because autonomic dysfunction spans several specialties of medicine, is largely based on good understanding of basic human physiology and anatomy, and interpretation of autonomic function testing is difficult. The 4th edition of the well known textbook of autonomic dysfunction, “Autonomic failure. A textbook of clinical disorders of the autonomic nervous system” aims to do this and much more. A huge collection of internationally renowned authorities contribute to this book.

However, the thread of continuity is sometimes lost or repeated in this book. For example, it would be difficult to find a “user friendly” table/diagram of how to interpret blood pressure and heart rate changes following head-up tilting test. There is considerable repetition of information. Chapters on autonomic and neurohumoral control of cerebral circulation is followed in part II of the book by a chapter on autoregulation and autonomic control of cerebral circulation. Similarly, most neurologists would find chapters on cardiovascular autonomic regulation and control of blood pressure and circulation in man rather difficult to understand. It is also questionable how much of the information contained within “Clinical autonomic testing” (Part III) is clinically applicable. Most investigation related chapters such as chapters 21 and 24 appear to be largely research based and information in these and other chapters shifts between research studies and clinically established observations. However, chapters on postprandial hypotension, sleep dysfunction, and sudomotor dysfunction are outstanding although the lack of mention of postprandial hypotension and its clinical significance in Parkinson’s disease is surprising.

Part IV of the book concentrates on the relatively common autonomic syndrome of multiple system atrophy (MSA) and the exceedingly rare pure autonomic failure (Part IV). Bannister and Mathias contribute to a most useful and clinically relevant chapter on clinical features and evaluation of the primary chronic autonomic failure syndromes. A more detailed discussion on the rather controversial notion of Parkinson’s disease and autonomic failure and its differentiation from MSA with manifest dysautonomia is lacking and would have been useful. There is also confusion in terminology. According to the recent consensus committee definition, MSA is subdivided in MSA-P and MSA-C subtypes, older terms such as striatonigral degeneration and olivopontocerebellar atrophy being obsolete. However, such terms keep on appearing both in the chapter by Bannister and Mathias and also in the chapter by S Daniel on neuropathology, which is nevertheless very informative. The following chapter by Matthews revisits much of the information already contained in previous sections of the book, such as a repetitive and confusing classification of autonomic dysfunction followed by a detailed neuropathological description of changes in ganglia and preganglionic neurones in dysautonomia. It seems this chapter is possibly better suited in the basic pathology introductory section of the book. The continuity and flow of this section is thus hampered by the order of chapters. Chapters detailing complex neuro-pathology, largely of research interest, follow chapters on clinically relevant tests of autonomic dysfunction. There is an excellent and clinically relevant chapter on management of postural hypotension, a clinical issue that perplexes a large number of neurologists and physicians for the care of the elderly. The latter chapter could have been enhanced by the inclusion of a flow chart outlining a step by step guide to treatment of postural hypotension, progressing from “first line treatment” to adjunctive treatment strategies. Furthermore, in the current climate of clinical governance and evidence based medicine, inclusion of evidence base for the use of the various treatment strategies mentioned in this chapter would have been useful. There are other omissions, such as the lack of mention of cardiac sympathetic nervous system, an issue that perplexes a large number of neurologists and Parkinson’s disease, a technique that is increasingly being recognised as an important tool to help differentiate between early Parkinson’s disease and MSA.

Part V of the book concentrates on peripheral autonomic neuropathies and there is an excellent chapter on diabetic autonomic failure. However, then a chapter is devoted to dopamine beta hydroxylase deficiency, which resembles a series of case reports of a condition few will encounter. A shorter, clinically relevant account of this condition could easily be accommodated under genetic causes of dysautonomia. In part VI, other important aspects of dysautonomia are discussed, notably syncope and ageing related changes. A simple diagram/table of interpretation of various haemodynamic changes following head-up tilting test would have been very useful for most neurologists who use this test clinically. In clinical practice, syncope is often confused with epileptic seizure. However, surprisingly little is mentioned about clinical differentiation and aspects of syncope and seizure. Once again, chapters on hypertension and cardiac failure overlap with this discussion and are of questionable clinical significance.

The book is clearly written, although sometimes the chapters vary in preparation, practical value, and clarity. The quality of illustrations is high and there are few, if any, frank errors. In summary, this is an essential book for its target audience and would be useful in most medical libraries and to researchers working in the area of autonomic dysfunction.
motor cortex stimulation for pain and movement disorder; deep-brain stimulation for pain; functional implanted stimulators for standing and walking in paraplegia; peroneal nerve stimulator implantation for central drop-foot; vagus nerve stimulation for epilepsy; and cochlear nucleus stimulation for deafness in NF2. Other contributions, such as that on BTXA for tension headache, are rather far removed from what we would recognise as the field of rehabilitation.

David Rushton

Radiosurgery, volume 4


Radiosurgery is a periodical for papers from the biannual meetings of the International Stereotactic Radiosurgical Society. Volume 4 of the periodical includes selected reports presented at the 5th biannual meeting. The publication is divided into sections on clinical subjects and contributions to physics and radiobiology. There are seven papers on intracranial vascular malformations, five on benign and seven on malignant intracranial tumours, two papers deal with radiosurgery for functional disorders, and eight are devoted to physics and radiobiology. The physics papers deal mainly with quality assurance issues of radiosurgery and are of interest to physicists working in the field.

One paper describes how 3D ultrasound images can be used to realise stereotactic radiation of extracranial targets where movements create a problem. A brief report on the histology of thalamic lesions in the baboon after stereotactic radiosurgery is the only contribution to radiobiology. Two thirds of the book are clinical papers of varying quality. Encouraging results of radiosurgical treatment for arteriovenous malformations are again presented, including a paper specifically devoted to treatment of larger malformations, which until now have eluded this technique. Another paper supports the value of gamma knife surgery for brainstem cavernous angiomas. Three chapters present positive results of gamma knife surgery for hormone secreting pituitary adenomas and the role of radiosurgery and stereotactic radiotherapy in the management of pituitary adenomas are reviewed in another chapter. The section on malignant tumours includes a paper describing the integration of metabolic data from stereotactic PET scanning in dosimetry planning. In the section on radiosurgery for functional disorders an update on the results of gamma knife surgery for mesial temporal lobe epilepsy is given. It is suggested that a therapeutic effect can be achieved even with subnecrotic radiation doses.

The book is of interest to persons working in the field of radiosurgery and is of limited interest also to neurosurgeons, neurologists, and neuro- oncologists who want to keep up with developments in the field.

Christie Lindquist

Textbook of neuropsychiatry and clinical neurosciences, 4th edition

Edited by Stuart Yudofsky and Robert Hales (Pp 1375 $219.00) Published by the American Psychiatric Publishing, Washington DC, 2002. ISBN 1 58562 004 1

"Clinical neurosciences" has been added to the title of this well known book of neuropsychiatry to acknowledge that, if they are to be effective, clinicians need to be conversant with advances in neurosciences. With over 1300 pages, it is a real heavyweight. Physically it’s the same size as Liberman’s most recent edition of Organic Psychiatry. The editors realise that their book is likely to be compared with this classic, and suggest that their book is a dependable American Jeep in contrast to the elegant Rolls Royce of previous “grand European texts”.

They have been able to attract some very authoritative authors and have endeavoured to ensure that each chapter is complete in itself. This works well by and large, but does result in quite a lot of duplication and I could find no attempt to signpost the reader to other relevant parts of the text. The book aims to please quite a wide target audience, from medical students through to specialists. This makes for a book that is easy to read and well presented; plenty of figures, boxes and tables break up the text. But there are some lacunae: example, I did not find it of much use when investigating the neuropsychiatric sequelae of viral encephalitis. The chapter on cerebrovascular disease was almost entirely limited to a discussion of stroke. As a result there is very little coverage of subarachnoid haemorrhage. I was also disappointed by the rather limited attempts to define the evidence base for some assertions.

There are some excellent review chapters. I particularly recommend “Bedside neuropsychiatry”, “Clinical imaging in neuropsychiatry”, and “The neuropsychological evaluation”; in fact almost all of the early chapters on principles of neuropsychiatry and neuropsychiatric assessment. The last chapter will be invaluable for those of us interested in neuropsychiatric training. The book covers a very large ground to a very high standard. I have a great deal of confidence in the content.

Neurologists and psychiatrists will find it extremely useful; it is dependable, easy to access, and right up to date.

Simon Fleminger

Acquired damage to the developing brain—timings and causation


Brain damage is a major burden to the affected individuals, their families, and to society. When it occurs around the time of birth parents will often question the adequacy of clinical care and seek redress in the courts. This book discusses the causes and timing of neonatal brain injury and is therefore likely to be of great interest to clinicians caring for infants and children, and to parents, and members of the legal profession.

The first few chapters deal with the clinical features and management of cerebral palsy, the epidemiology, aetiology, and genetic causes. The definition of what constitutes cerebral palsy can be confusing, which is probably why the definition is repeated in several of the chapters. Neuroimaging, genetic, and metabolic studies have identified disorders that were previously considered under the umbrella term ‘cerebral palsy’. A recent consensus statement from European cerebral palsy registers is helpful. Even more problematic has been the study of the timing of cerebral injury and the causes of cerebral palsy. Current publications emphasise the importance of prenatal factors in the aetiology of cerebral palsy, and this view is repeated in the book. However, when recognisable developmental and metabolic conditions are excluded, most full term infants who develop encephalopathy after birth have suffered hypoxic ischaemic injury, and the chapters on pathophysiology and pathology deal mainly with this type of injury. The patterns of damage that occur at different developmental ages are clearly described and the illustrative plates are superb. In infants who survive brain injury, the aetiology and timing of the injury must be assessed by clinical examination and investigations. MRI is currently the key technique and this is well described in two chapters with the aid of several images. The final chapter discusses the legal considerations that determine the outcome of litigation and will be of interest to many clinicians.

In summary, this is a welcome reappraisal of brain damage in newborn infants. However, brain injury in the preterm is not discussed in sufficient detail and is mainly limited to the classical problems of haemorrhage and severe white matter injury, which are now less common. There is much repetition throughout the book and this gives the impression that the book is a collection of review articles rather than a cohesive account.

Denis Azzopardi

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Dysphagia due to Chiari I malformation mimicking ALS

J Gamez, E Santamarina and A Codina

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