Acute Optic Neuritis in Australia: a 13 year prospective study

The frequency with which multiple sclerosis develops after an attack of acute optic neuritis varies widely in different series and has been reported to range from 11.5% to 85%. The variability in the findings may relate to different methods of patient selection, diagnostic criteria, geographical factors, duration of follow up, and study design.

A cohort of 82 patients (59 females, 23 males) with uncomplicated ON aged 10 to 50 years (mean 29.2) who were examined neurologically and had visual evoked responses (VERs) performed in our department during the period 1973–83 were re-examined in 1983–85. Twenty six of the patients (32%) had progressed to probable or clinically definite multiple sclerosis during the follow up period of 7–114 (mean 57) months. Female sex, young adult age, and the presence of HLA-B7 or DR2 seemed to increase the risk of developing the disease.

Seventy one of the 82 (87%) (52 females, 19 males) were reviewed in 1991–2; 11 patients could not be traced. Neurological examination was performed on 49; two patients had died with multiple sclerosis and a telephone questionnaire was completed on the remainder. Thirty three (46%, or 40% of the original 82) had developed probable or clinically definite multiple sclerosis after a mean duration of 13.25 years (range 8–29.6 years). Eight cases had developed multiple sclerosis since the previous review. Kaplan-Meier and actuarial methods of assessment, predicted that 52% would develop the disease after 15 years (figure). There was a significantly greater risk of developing multiple sclerosis for patients in the 21–30 year age group than those outside this range but there was no significant difference in the rate of progression to the disease for males and females. There was no significant difference in the probability of developing multiple sclerosis in patients with single or recurrent attacks of optic neuritis or bilateral optic neuritis, nor in those who were DR-2 positive (table 1).

The finding in the Australian cohort that 52% of patients with optic neuritis were at risk of developing probable or clinically definite multiple sclerosis in 15 years.

Clinical features of patients with optic neuritis

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<td>Age (y):</td>
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*Four subjects not typed.

Discussion

Multiple sclerosis in 15 years is comparable with that of 57% in 11.6 years in the United Kingdom, 44% in the United States, and 45% in Sweden.

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Post-traumatic hydrocephalus: influence of cranietomy on the CSF circulation

Post-traumatic ventricular dilatation may have a wide range of aetiological factors: starting from neuronal loss due to head trauma and possible secondary ischaemic insults, to obstruction of CSF circulation resulting in hydrocephalus. It is important to differentiate between post-traumatic hydrocephalus and brain atrophy before considering placement of a shunt. Making this decision can be facilitated by measurement of the resistance to CSF outflow. However, the pattern of the CSF circulation may change dramatically after a cranietomy resulting from a previously decompressive cranietomy for refractory intracranial hypertension after head injury. The effect of the skull and dura on CSF hydrodynamics has been explored experimentally, and the resistance to CSF outflow after cranietomy decreases two-fold and brain compliance (expressed using the pressure-volume index, PVI) increases. This problem is important clinically as the following case illustrates:

A 44 year old man fell downstairs and was admitted with a Glasgow coma score (GCS) of 4. Brain CT disclosed an intracerebral haematoma, which required a right frontal lobectomy and decompressive cranietomy to control raised intracranial pressure. Five months later he remained medically disabled with deteriorating GCS and increasing spasticity. Brain CT showed a progressive ventricular dilatation with widening of the cortical sulci. Cranietomy had been delayed because of persistent problems with infections.

The first lumbar computerised infusions test was performed 5 months after injury to study the patient's CSF circulation. The opening pressure was low (5 mm Hg) with a very low pulse amplitude. An infusion of normal saline at a rate of 1.5 ml/min increased the intracranial pressure (ICP) to a plateau of 12.2 mm Hg within 22 minutes. The calculated resistance to CSF outflow was 5.5 mm Hg/ml/min and the pressure-volume index was increased to 28 ml (figure).

It is important to mention here that the normal range for the pressure-volume index, calculated from the constant rate infusion (as an inverse of elastic coefficient), is different from the values obtained by the bolus injection. Values below 13 ml indicate a tight brain, from 13 ml to 23 ml normal compliance and above 23 ml hypotensive brain.

A slow constant rate infusion tests global compliance of the cranial axis whereas a fast bolus volume load probably tests compartmental compliance of the container into which the extra volume is added.

This pattern of CSF circulation with low or normal resistance to CSF outflow, increased brain compliance, and very few vasogenic waves is characteristic of cerebral atrophy.

Cranietomy was carried out as his deterioration was attributed to the “syndrome of trephined” where the brain sinks in, particularly with erect posture and dehydration producing deterioration in conscious level and focal signs. However, 1 month later, there had been no progress in the patient’s condition and repeat CT again suggested progressive ventriculomegaly. The infusion study was repeated. The opening ICP was now dramatically different (10 mm Hg) to the previous study. However, the pulse amplitude (1.5 mm Hg) was increased, and the calculated resistance to CSF outflow was greatly increased to 20 mm Hg/ml/min, with a pressure-volume index of 15 ml. Such a pattern is specific for hydrocephalus. After this test the patient was shunted with a Codman Medos programmable valve (setting 120 mm H2O) and the patient remained asymptomatic with remarkable clinical improvement, the GCS rose to 14, he began to talk and his spasticity in his arms decreased dramatically. It is obvious why the pressure-volume compensatory reserve (PVI) decreases after cranietomy; the interpretation of an increase in the resistance to CSF is not immediately apparent. Two explanations are possible:

The patient had developed an acute hydrocephalus, possibly as a result of traumatic subarachnoid haemorrhage. Cranietomy was a factor allowing compensation of CSF circulation in the early stages. It is difficult to explain what is the nature of such compensation. Shapiro et al. attempted to offer an interesting but conceptually difficult hypothesis that the time constant (resistance to CSF outflow × compliance of cerebrospinal space) of cerebrospinal system hydrodynamics has a tendency to remain constant. Therefore, a
mechanistic increase in compliance after craniectomy tends to be followed by a decrease in the resistance to CSF outflow. This process may be reversed after cranioplasty—that is, a decrease in PVI may be followed by an increase in the resistance to CSF outflow.

The second possible scenario is more important for clinical management. A large craniectomy may facilitate irreversible ventricular enlargement over weeks or months. Thus, after cranioplasty, the expanded ventricles may, via the cerebral mantle, obstruct the lumen of the cortical subarachnoid space and increase the resistance to CSF outflow. 

This case demonstrates that when the CSF circulation is studied in patients with a large craniectomy the CSF outflow resistance cannot be taken reliably as a guide for shunting. Overnight ICP monitoring or CSF infusion study should be performed after cranioplasty, when CSF circulatory reserve decreases dramatically. Moreover, a prolonged period without a bone flap may encourage ventricular dilatation.

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CT and infusion studies. (A) Scan performed on admission. (B) After right frontal lobectomy and bone flap removal. (C) Four months after injury, before cranioplasty. (F) Infusion test demonstrated low resistance to CSF outflow and increased brain compliance. ICP=mean intracranial pressure; AMP= pulse amplitude of ICP waveform. Constant infusion rate of 1.5 ml/min is indicated by a thick horizontal line. X axis=time. (D) Five months after injury, after cranioplasty. (G) Infusion test demonstrated grossly increased resistance to CSF outflow and normal brain compliance. (E) One month after shunting: normalization of ventricles. Bicaudate index decreased from 33% to 21% with a decrease in the 3rd ventricle diameter (from 13 mm to 8 mm).
Diencephalic amnesia and apraxia after left thalamic infarction

Amnesia and apraxia are unusual manifestations of unilateral thalamic lesions. A patient in whom severe amnesia and apraxia were the presenting features of a left thalamic infarct is presented. The findings support the concept that memory and praxis both utilise circuits which include the dominant thalamus.

A 78 year old right handed Hungarian woman presented with memory loss and disorientation. She had been well and conversed normally with her daughter on the evening before presentation. The next morning, her daughter was alarmed to find her mother’s house in a state of disarray. Dishes were unwashed, lights left on, and doors open. The patient seemed baffled by eating utensils, attempting to scoop food with her knife. Later that morning, she failed to recognise longstanding Hungarian friends. She was unable to recall her address, the name of the city in which she lived, or the names of her grandchildren. She subsequently failed to recognise her family doctor of 7 years. History included non-insulin dependent diabetes, hypertension, hyperlipidaemia, and atrial fibrillation. Medications were digoxin, glipizide, and metoprolol. Captopril had been prescribed 4 weeks previously but was ceased 2 days before presentation due to presyncope symptoms. The patient consumed no alcohol. There was no history of cerebrovascular events.

Cognitive functions were examined at the bedside with the assistance of an interpreter, as the patient spoke no English, although she conversed freely in her native Hungarian. She had no recollection of events since emigrating to Australia 50 years previously, gave her correct maiden name, and could not recognise or name her grandchildren, although she recognised her daughter. She acknowledged she was in a hospital, but maintained it was in Budapest and the year was 1947. Although her recollections regarding her early life and wartime Hungary seemed accurate, she confabulated when asked for details of recent events. Short term recall of verbal material and people was poor. The patient was able to name objects such as a pencil and a watch, and obey two and three stage commands. She wrote her name and copied simple designs correctly, and could imitate gestures such as waving goodbye or blowing a kiss. However, she was unable to use eating utensils or a toothbrush, either in pantomime or when provided with the object itself. Movements of the face and limbs were normal, and there were no sensory abnormalities. Knee and ankle jerks were absent bilaterally and both plantar responses were extensor. General examination revealed atraial fibrillation and mild cardiomegaly.

The patient continued to display severe impairment of anterograde memory. She was reluctant to leave her bed, and quickly became lost unless supervised. She did not recognise familiar staff members and was unable to use ward landmarks to reorientate herself. She required assistance to feed herself, brush her teeth, and shower. When reviewed 3 months later, her memory disturbance and apraxia for simple action and daily life (such as brushing her teeth) persisted, necessitating care in a supervised environment.

Brain MRI (fig.) showed a left anterior thalamic lesion consistent with lacunar infarction and periventricular white matter ischaemic changes.
Transverse myelopathy in the antiphospholipid antibody syndrome: pinworm infestation as a trigger?

The antiphospholipid antibody syndrome is a disorder characterised by the production of autoantibodies directed against negatively charged cell membrane phospholipids. An- tiphospholipid antibodies have been described in various neurological disorders. It has been generally accepted that viral, bacterial, and parasitic infections can serve as a trigger for autoimmune reactions. Despite the growing knowledge that has accumulated, the relation between parasites and autoimmunity has not been clarified. Enterobius vermicularis (pinworm) is a nematode rarely found outside the gastrointestinal tract, but allergic reaction due to enterobiasis has been reported. We describe the case of transverse myelopathy preceded by intestinal pinworm infestation in the primary antiphospholipid antibody syndrome. To our knowledge, such an association has not been reported previously. Pinworm therapy was complicated by the Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction manifested by temporary exacerbation of previously quiescent neurological symptoms. In March 1998, a 40 year old woman who complained of perianal itching noticed the presence of worms migrating from the anus. Three days later itching and numbness involved both legs, and the patient had weakness in the legs. These symptoms progressed over the next 3 days to severe paraparesis and urinary urgency. Her medical history was relevant for three unexplained miscarriages which had occurred in midpregnancies. In the local hospital, she underwent brain and lumbar-sacral spine MRI and findings were normal. Cerebrospinal fluid examination disclosed slightly raised proteins of 670 mg/l, 2 lymphocytes/mm³, oligoclonal immunoglobulin (Ig) G bands were absent. She was treated with methylprednisolone (1 g/day) intravenously for 3 days with subsequent gradual tapering off, which was associated with substantial improvement of motor, sensory, and sphincter disturbances. At the end of April 1998, the patient was transferred to our hospital for further investigation.

The neurological examination showed mild spastic paraparesis, bilateral Babinski’s sign, and a Th-12 sensory level. Erythrocyte sedimentation rate was 34. Complete blood count was normal. Renal function, angiotensin converting enzyme, concentrations of IgG, IgM, IgA, IgE, and immune complexes, screening for antinuclear (HEp-2 cells), anti-ds DNA, antineutrophil cytoplasmic, antimitochondrial, and antiparietal cell antibodies, rheumatoid factor, and the search for antineutrotopic virus and antiBorreia antibodies were normal or negative. A venereal disease research laboratory (VDRL) test was negative. A medium positive concentration of IgM anticitrullinated protein antibody was detected, and lupus anticoagulant was negative. Raised titers of serum IgG and IgM anti-GM1 (1:1600 and 1:3200, respectively) and anti sulfatide antibodies (1:6400, for both classes) were also demonstrated. Class II human leucocyte antigen (HLA) typing showed the presence of HLA-DR4, DR5, DR52, DR53, DQ2, and DQ3. Cerebral and thoracic spine MRI was normal. Electromyoneurography was normal. Because the patient complained of reappearance of worms and perianal itching, a colonic and rectum tape test was performed and diagnosis of enterobiasis was established. Methenamozole was given in a single dose of 100 mg and the next day the Jarisch-Herxheimer reaction occurred, with deterioration of leg spasticity, inability to walk, and development of urinary retention. At that time, low positive IgG ACA was detected. The dose of prednisone was raised to 50 mg/day and slowly tapered off within the next 2 months. Sphincter disturbances resolved in 1 day and motor dysfunction gradually improved with only mild spasticity left. Diagnosis of antiphospholipid antibody syndrome in our patient was based on the presence of recurrent fetal loss, transverse myelopathy, and raised ACA. The ACA titre was probably lowered by previously administered corticosteroids. Therefore there are several reports of transverse myelopathy as a manifestation of antiphospholipid antibody syndrome in the past decade. A potential pathogenic role of antiphospholipid antibodies in transverse myelopathy might be based either on vasculopathy or on interaction with spinal cord phospholipids. Injection by helminths is universally associated with activation of T helper 2 (Th2)-type cells. Recent mechanisms and protective value of antithelmintic Th2 responses, such responses may also be detrimental to the host. The presence of ACA, anti-GM1, and antisulfatide antibodies in our patient suggested a cross response to E. vermicularis, as it has been shown that nema- todes contain cardiolipin, ganglioside GM1, and sulfatides within their complex lipid composition. When parasites share epitopes with host tissue, such molecular mimicry may exploit host immune tolerance against a self determinant. Autoimmunity may occur if immune tolerance is overriden in genetically susceptible hosts. It has been proposed that the presence of pathogenic cross reactive autoantibodies could be the basis for the relation between nematoses and autoimmunity. It may be also postulated that E. vermicularis stimulated Th2 response which enhanced polyclonal autoantibody production resulting in the presence of ACA, anti-GM1, and antisulfatide antibodies. The association of transverse myelopathy, ACA, and enterobiasis might be purely coincidental, which we assume to be very unlikely. The finding of different autoantibodies, as well as the absence of ACA, strongly suggests that pinworm infestation in our patient was the “triggering event” for loss of immune tolerance and production of autoantibodies against cardiolipin and led to the development of transverse myelopathy. The appearance of the spinal cord damage caused by ACA in our patient might have been facilitated by the simultaneous effect of anti-GM1 and antisulfatide antibodies. A significant subset of the human anti-GM1 antibodies that reacted with the Gal(b1–3)GalNAc determinant also bound to oligodenrocyte-myelin glycoprotein which is a constituent of the myelin of the CNS. As for antisulfatide antibodies, their presence has been already shown in some diseases affecting the CNS. It is clear that parasitic infections can serve as a trigger factor of autoimmune reactivity, but the presence of autoantibodies or self reactive T cells is rarely associated with clinical manifestations. They develop only in patients with adequate immunogenetic and hormonal background for autoimmune diseases. In several studies, increased frequencies of HLA-DR4, DR7, and DR3, and DQ2 were found in patients with antiphospholipid antibody syndrome, and in our patient HLA-DR4 and DR53 were present. Additional studies are necessary to further elucidate the complex mechanisms of involvement of intestinal helminths in the processes of autoimmune activity.
tation using a finger but there was a left homonymous field defect to a red pin and he had a left afferent pupillary defect. Fundoscopy showed bilateral optic atrophy. The remainder of the cranial nerve examination was normal. In the arms tone and power were normal, but coordination was mildly impaired on the right. The reflexes were exaggerated and Hoffman’s sign was present bilaterally. A palmarmental reflex was present on the right. In the legs power was normal, but tone was increased and there were several beats of ankle clonus; reflexes were exaggerated and plantar responses were upgoing. Coordination was impaired in both legs, his gait was ataxic, and Romberg’s test was positive. He had a minor reduction in vibration sensation at the right ankle; otherwise sensation was normal. He appeared moderately tanned, but there was no other hyperpigmentation. Supine blood pressure was 114/78, falling to 108/80 on standing. The remainder of the examination was normal.

Routine biochemistry was normal. A morning cortisol was 469 nmol/l (normal >160 nmol/l), but a short synacthen test showed an abnormally flat response (serum

Humphrey visual field testing demonstrated a left homonymous field defect. Brain MRI was abnormal (figure A and B). He was placed on a very low fat diet with supplements of glycerol trioleate oil.

By October 1996 his headaches had settled but his eyesight, memory, coordination, and walking were worse. Visual acuity was below 6/60 in both eyes. Brain MRI was repeated (figure C-E). By August 1997 there had been no new clinical developments (MRI figure F-G). In May 1998 he complained of navigational difficulties in familiar surroundings, further memory loss, and cognitive decline (MRI figure H-I).

In May 1996 (figure A) T2 weighted axial imaging showed high signal intensity areas in the region of the right lateral geniculate nucleus and left optic tract. The occipital white matter was normal. T1 weighted images with gadolinium contrast enhancement (figure B) showed bilateral enhancement of the optic radiations and right cerebral optic tracts. By October 1996 (figure C) T2 weighted axial imaging showed spread of the areas of high signal intensity continuously from the lateral geniculate nuclei posteriorly along the optic radiations into the white matter of both occipital lobes, more prominent on the right. T1 weighted images showed contrast enhancement in the optic chiasm and optic tracts (figure D). By October 1998 (figure E) T2 weighted imaging showed spread of the areas of high signal intensity along the fibre tracts of that system, the anatomy of which is usually allowed visualisation of parts of the visual cortex with CT. This is well illustrated as is the spread of disease along the fibre tracts of that system. This allowed visualisation of parts of the visual system, the anatomy of which is usually hidden—for example, the intracerebral portions of the optic tracts. The characteristic MRI appearances are thought to result from an advancing front of active demyelination, followed by an area of inflammatory cellular response demonstrating contrast enhancement, surrounded by areas of established damage, gliosis, and neuronal loss.

By August 1997 (figure F) there had been further progression in the white matter changes in both occipital lobes, with spread to the splenium of the corpus callosum. Contrast enhancement (figure G) was seen in the optic radiations and right occipital white matter. The cerebellar white matter was of low signal intensity, with a small area of contrast enhancement (figure H) showing bilateral enhancement in the optic chiasm and optic tracts (figure I). There was increased signal intensity in the right occipital lobe, with spread to the right of the midline.

In May 1998 (figure H and I) the changes in white matter were more extensive with the appearance of ring enhancement.

Our case illustrates MRI appearances typical of adrenoleukodystrophy and demonstrates in particular the evolution of these changes with time. The tendency of this condition to affect the visual pathways selectively is well illustrated as is the spread of disease along the fibre tracts of that system. This allowed visualisation of parts of the visual system, the anatomy of which is usually hidden—for example, the intracerebral portion of the optic tracts. The characteristic MRI appearances are thought to result from an advancing front of active demyelination, followed by an area of inflammatory cellular response demonstrating contrast enhancement, surrounded by areas of established damage, gliosis, and neuronal loss.

Golf ball epilepsy

Blunt head injuries may cause epilepsy. We present the cases of four young people whose heads were all subject to contact with golf balls travelling at speed. Each had post-traumatic seizures, three early and one late, despite the apparent absence of post-traumatic amnesia. Although many patients who develop epilepsy recall some type of head injury preceding their first seizure, post-traumatic epilepsy probably accounts for less than 5% of all the epilepsies. There is good evidence that the risk of post-traumatic epilepsy increases with the severity of the injury. Thus, Jennett identified the presence of intracranial haemorrhage, dural laceration, and early post-traumatic seizures as the chief risk factors for late post-traumatic epilepsy. Annegers et al also emphasised that in the absence of a post-traumatic amnesia of 30 minutes or greater, there was no significant increased risk for the development of post-traumatic epilepsy.

From a practical point of view and for medicolegal purposes, it is necessary to decide if a seizure is post-traumatic. As a general rule it may be stated that if the person concerned does not give a history of a post-traumatic amnesia lasting for a significant period of time (an hour or more), and there is no history of a compound or depressed fracture with dural tear, it is reasonable to exclude the possibility that the epilepsy is post-traumatic. However, it is worth noting that this view is based on Jennett's work and precedes CT. There is no good evidence from a large series to indicate whether findings on acute imaging add anything to the prediction of post-traumatic epilepsy.


(A) CT showing acute extradural haematoma in patient 1. (B) CT 5 days after A showing persisting cortical abnormality after evacuation of extradural haematoma. (C) CT demonstrating minor depressed skull fracture at site of impact. (D) CT showing late cortical changes at presumed site of impact 4 years after injury.
Four examples of acute symptomatic seizures and epilepsy developing after head injuries with golf balls are described, which seem to be an exception to these clinical rules. An 11 year old boy was struck on the right temple by a golf ball resulting in right frontotemporal scalp contusion. His consciousness was not impaired until about 3 hours later when he became drowsy and had two focal motor seizures affecting the left arm. He was intubated and ventilated. A head CT showed a right frontotemporal extradural haematoma with no skull fracture (figure A). The haematoma was evacuated (figure B). He was woken and extubated the next day and was discharged without neurological impairment two days later on phenobarbital. No further follow up is yet available.

A 16 year old boy, who was a keen golfer with a single figure handicap, was struck on the head by a golf ball which rebounded several yards after striking him on the forehead. He experienced local pain, bruising, and swelling. Although he was never unconscious, some 4–5 hours later he developed repetitive jerking of the right face and arm. He was taken to his local casualty department where the diagnosis of serial focal motor seizures was made. His consciousness was then somewhat obtunded. A brain CT was performed which showed a small, discrete, spherical intracerebral haematoma in the left frontotemporal lobe. He was made aware by the child psychiatrist that he had been struck (similar in shape, but more hypertensive than the appearance in the figure B). The haematoma gave the distinct impression of a golf ball embedded in the surface of the cerebral hemisphere!

He was treated with parenteral anti-epileptic drugs and subsequently with thio- pentone requiring ventilation for 48 hours while he was loaded with phenytoin.

He was maintained on phenytoin for 12 months but subsequently this was withdrawn and he has remained seizure free.

A 5 year old girl was struck on the forehead above the right eye by a golf ball struck 10 metres away. On arrival in the accident and emergency department she was fully alert, oriented, and neurologically intact. A lacrimation was present but there had been no apparent loss of consciousness or vomiting. However, 90 minutes after the injury she had a generalised tonic clonic seizure lasting 25 minutes. She was intubated and a brain CT scan showed a very small depressed fracture with minimal haemorrhagic contusion in the cortex of the right frontal lobe (figure C). She was woken and extubated later that day. She has had no further seizures.

A 12 year old boy was practising golf with a friend. He was struck on the front of the head by a golf ball which rebounded a considerable distance after striking him. He did not lose consciousness and had no more than localised pain, tenderness, and bruising at the site of impact. He did not seek any medical advice about the injury. Over the next 4 years he had three well documented tonic-clonic seizures that stopped on awakening from sleep.

A CT scan 3 years after the original injury showed a small, wedge shaped area of low density affecting the cortex close to the point at which he recalls being struck (figure D).

The heads of these four young people were all subject to contact with golf balls which at club level travel at speeds of up to 130 miles/ hour. Each had post-traumatic seizures, three early and one late, despite the apparent absence of post-traumatic amnesia.

Patients 1 and 2 would indicate that this kind of injury is capable of transferring energy across the skull, independent of a skull fracture, to cause an acute extradural or cortical haematoma. In patient 1 the lesion identified at a later date by CT is consistent with the late consolidation of intracranial haematoma. It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the late epilepsy in patient 4 was also related to the initial golf ball injury.

In the third patient, a minor depressed fracture and contusion again associated with an early seizure without evidence of intervening impairment of consciousness. It does therefore seem that golf ball injuries are capable of giving rise to both acute symptomatic seizures and late epilepsy without causing post-traumatic amnesia, skull fracture or dural tear. CT evidence, however, would predict the possibility of seizures in these examples in whom the development of post-traumatic epilepsy probably results from the physical properties of golf balls and their ability to transmit considerable mechanical energy at a small site of impact. The problem is one of which conditions on golf courses (and their doctors) should be aware.

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1 Hauser WA, Hesdorffer DC. Epilepsy: frequency, causes and consequences. New York: Demos Publications, 1999.

Sensory predominant neuropsychopathy with GM, antibodies, conduction blocks, and orbital pseudotumour

Two male patients developed multifocal sensory neuropsychopathy with high titre IgM anti-GM, antibodies (Waldman et al, 2000) and infiltrative orbitopathy. Nerve conduction studies showed multiple motor conduction blocks and evidence of a similar phenomenon in sensory nerves. Both patients deteriorated after corticosteroid administration but benefited substantially from intravenous immunoglobulin therapy. Our findings suggest the existence of a predominantly sensory subtype of multifocal motor neuropsychopathy (MMN) and challenge the postulated motor specificity of anti-GM, antibodies.

Anti-GM, antibodies have been implicated in the aetiology of multifocal motor neuropsychopathy (MMN) and are assumed to be specific for this disease when occurring at high titres. We report on two patients with high titre IgM anti-GM, antibodies and electrophysiological features typical of MMN presenting with severe sensory neuropsychopathy.

Patient 1 was a 70 year old man who developed asymmetric numbness of limbs and difficulty in performing fine motor movements around the age of 55. Sensory deficits showed a multifocal pattern (multiple mononeuropathy) and involved proximal limb regions, trunk, and face. The course of illness was steadily deteriorating with some episodes of prominent disease progression usually preceded by minor infections. After 10 years he was unable to write, needed assistance for dressing and walking, and complained of diplia. Neurological examination showed profound sensory loss in sensory modalities in the arms and legs and pseudoneu spheres of the hands and wrists. Deep tendon reflexes were preserved and muscle strength was normal. The patient showed marked protraction and downward deviation of the left eye with a complex impairment of all eye movements.

Patient 2, a 68 year old man, reported an insidious onset and gradual worsening of asymmetric sensory loss and sensory neuropathy (MMN) and are assumed to be specific for this disease when occurring at high titres. We report on two patients with high titre IgM anti-GM, antibodies and electrophysiological features typical of MMN presenting with severe sensory neuropsychopathy.

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g/kg body weight/day for five consecutive days). Gait normalised, fine motor movements and ophthalmoplegia markedly improved, and motor conduction blocks partially resolved. In addition, low amplitude sensory nerve action potentials reoccurred.

In the literature, there is circumstantial evidence of a pathogenic role of high titre IgM anti-GM1 antibodies in the mediation of motor conduction blocks in MMN.1 Often, the antibody attack is directed at the Gal(â-3)GalNac epitope of GM1. This carbohydrate group, however, is also an obligatory constituent of GD4, (cross reactivity), which was implicated in the aetiology of sensory neuropathies. GD4 distributes on human dorsal root ganglion cells and paranoid myelin and shows comparable immunostaining with anti-GM1 antibodies with Gal(â-3)GalNac specificity and antibodies to disialosyl residues of GD3.2 This and various other findings challenge a motor specificity of anti-GM1 antibodies and, instead, suggest a vulnerability of part of the sensory system. Actually, nerve conduction studies in previous series of patients with MMN showed numerous sensory abnormalities, as did pathological evaluation of sensory nerve biopsy specimens.3,4 5

We report on a predominantly sensory variant of MMN found in two male patients. Both had IgM anti-GM1, and antisialo-GM1, antibodies at titres high enough to be assumed specific for MMN.1,5 Despite near normal muscle strength both of our patients had multiple motor conduction blocks. Rapid clinical improvement after IVIg therapy despite a more than 10 year history of illness tempts us to speculate on a similar phenomenon in sensory nerves (sensory conduction block).6

Good response to therapy argues against a pathogenetic significance of high titre GD4 antibodies in patient 2, because the rare GD4 associated sensory axonal neuropathy (sensory ganglionopathy) is mostly irreversible. In addition, this patient showed multiple conduction blocks and slowing of nerve conduction velocities rather than predominantly axonal damage and had no monoclonal gammopathy, which is usually present in cases with the GD4 associated neuropathy.

We propose that multifocal neuropathies with conduction blocks and high titre anti-GM antibodies have a clinical range from predominantly sensory to predominantly motor variants and suggest that all these variants be subsumed under the term “multifocal motor-sensory neuropathy” (MMSN). This concept is of clinical relevance in that all phenotypes share the same therapeutic peculiarities including good response to IVlg and inefficaciousness (most cases) or even unfavorable effects of corticosteroids, which are first line drugs in the treatment of other immune neuropathies. Our report aims to increase awareness for sometimes prominent sensory involvement in M/M/S/N and to facilitate early and accurate diagnosis in such patients.

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ALTERATIONS OF MUSCARINIC ACETYLCHOLINE RECEPTOR SUBTYPES IN DIFFUSE LEWY BODY DISEASE: RELATION TO ALZHEIMER’S DISEASE

The article by Shiozaki et al demonstrating significantly less muscarinic acetylcholine receptor binding sites in the temporal cortex in dementia with Lewy bodies than in Alzheimer’s disease and different upregulation of the m1 and m2 receptor subtypes suggests differences in the manner of demyelination of the cholinergic system between both dementing disorders that may be of basic and practical therapeutic relevance. The more severe reduction of chAT activity in the neocortex in dementia with Lewy bodies than in Alzheimer’s disease, the higher upregulation of the postsynaptic m1 receptor in dementia with Lewy bodies, and the higher level of the presynaptic m2 receptor subtype in Alzheimer’s disease suggest a severe depletion of presynaptic projection neurons in dementia with Lewy bodies but their relative preservation or upregulation in Alzheimer’s disease. These data are in line with previous—including personal—findings on cell loss and shrinkage in the cholinergic magnocellular posterior part of the nucleus basalis of Meynert in dementing neurodegenerative disorders. In Parkinson’s disease (brain stem type of dementia with Lewy bodies), cell depletion in the nucleus basalis of Meynert averages 30% to 40% without correlation with age or duration of the illness. It is much higher in demented patients and Parkinson’s disease (similar to Alzheimer’s disease range 50% to 70%) than in non-demented patients (0% to 40%), who show neuronal loss similar to or only slightly higher than age matched controls. Cell loss in the nucleus basalis of Meynert in non-demented patients with Parkinson’s disease is usually associated with little or no cortical Alzheimer’s disease pathology, whereas in severely demented patients with Parkinson’s disease, heavy cell depletion in the nucleus basalis of Meynert is often, but inconsistently, accompanied by severe cortical neuritic Alzheimer’s disease pathology suggesting threshold levels of cholinergic forebrain impairment and deficit for the development of dementia. Even more severe depletion of the nucleus basalis of Meynert with 75% to 80% loss of large cholinergic neurones is found in dementia with Lewy bodies (figure). There were no major differences in cell loss in the nucleus basalis of Meynert between dementia with Lewy bodies with “plaque only” Alzheimer’s disease (two cases) and with “true” Alzheimer’s disease (eight cases with Braak stages V or VI), Lewy bodies and neurofibillary tangles in the nucleus basalis of Meynert neurons were seen in eight brains of patients with Lewy body disease.
These changes are associated with a decrease in cholinergic innervation of the cortex and hippocampus that may or may not correlate with the severity of cell loss in the nucleus basalis of Meynert and mental status. Neocortical cholinergic activity (choline acetyltransferase) is far more severely depleted in dementia with Lewy bodies than in Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, and correlates well with dementia and nucleus basalis of Meynert pathology (neuron loss, tangles, and Lewy bodies), but not with local cortical pathology. The heterogeneity of degeneration of cholinergic neurons in the basal forebrain and its relative independence from cortical pathology suggests primary involvement of the basal forebrain in Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, by contrast with probable retrograde damage in Alzheimer's disease and dementia with Lewy bodies confirmed by defective retrograde transport of nerve growth factor to the nucleus basalis of Meynert in Alzheimer's disease. ¹

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Mortality from Parkinson's disease

The publication of the 10 year mortality data from the Sydney multicentre study of Parkinson's disease serves as a timely reminder that patients with this condition still die at a rate in excess of their peers despite advances in therapeutics and surgery. ²

This list has been lost on many of our colleagues working in this area, both on the clinical and the research fronts. On many occasions at local and national meetings, I have been forced to remind people that levo-dopa has not normalised mortality rates in Parkinson's disease. The heterogeneity of degeneration of cholinergic neurons in the basal forebrain and its relative independence from cortical pathology suggests primary involvement of the basal forebrain in Alzheimer's disease and Parkinson's disease, by contrast with probable retrograde damage in Alzheimer's disease and dementia with Lewy bodies confirmed by defective retrograde transport of nerve growth factor to the nucleus basalis of Meynert in Alzheimer's disease. ¹

Figure A indicates, as Hely et al ³ point out, the fall in standardised mortality rates (SMRs) in the early years of levodopa use but a return to mean SMRs of between 1.5 and 2.0 over the past decade. All of the studies over the past 10 years show a statistically significant difference as the 95% confidence intervals (95% CIs) do not embrace 1. In some, the upper 95% CI overlaps the original Hely and Yahr study in the prelevodopa era. These results mirror national mortality statistics for England and Wales (figure B). The fall in death rates in the late 1970s and early 1980s has now returned to a steady rise, thought to be due to the aging of the population. These data must act as a spur to attempts to develop neuroprotective or restorative therapies which substantially reduce mortality from Parkinson's disease.

Large pragmatic studies in the future which examine novel treatments or approaches in early Parkinson's disease must consider not only quality of life and health economics issues, but also mortality in the hope of establishing reduced death rates.

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7 Diamond SG, Markham CH. Present mortality in Parkinson's disease: the ratio of observed to expected deaths with a method to calculate expected deaths. J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry 1976;38:259–69.
Anaphylactoid reaction to methylprednisolone. Is it surprising when pharmacological and immune effects of a drug differ?

Clear reports a case of anaphylactoid reaction to methylprednisolone which developed after starting treatment with interferon β-1b. She states that “allergic reaction to steroids is rare and anaphylactoid reaction to methylprednisolone rarer still with only three reports in the literature.” Her report surprised us as on the week of publication of her case we had a patient with multiple sclerosis who developed an urticarial rash within 15 minutes of commencing treatment with intravenous methylprednisolone. Although we thought this to be an unusual response to methylprednisolone, we were not overly perplexed by the drug’s capacity to induce a presumably IgE mediated immune response. Surely for almost all drugs the pharmacological and immune properties are quite distinct.

I undertook a brief literature search. The database was interrogated using Medline Pubmed and the words “anaphylaxis” and “methylprednisolone”. At least 29 cases of anaphylactoid reaction to methylprednisolone are documented in this simple search. Kamm and Hagmeyer systematically review allergic reactions to corticosteroids in the April 1999 publication of Annals of Pharmacotherapy. Their primary data source is a Medline search from January 1966 to December 1997. They report 36 allergic-type reactions to intravenous corticosteroids, including death in 12 patients suspected to be related to corticosteroid anaphylaxis. Methylprednisolone and hydrocortisone were the most commonly implicated corticosteroids. Is it surprising that the frequency of reporting of anaphylactoid responses to corticosteroids is low? I can see no inherent paradox between the ability of methylprednisolone to bind IgE and its pharmacological anti-inflammatory action. Clear’s speculations about mechanisms by which interferon β may predispose to anaphylaxis may be interesting. However, it is unreasonable to ascribe the anaphylactoid response to methylprednisolone to therapy with interferon β.

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Clear replies:
Mec culpa! The disparity in yield of our literature searches reflects different search strategies. These are often problems in electronic search systems. It is still reasonable to state, though, as Van den Berg and Van Eikema Hommes do in their report,1 that anaphylactoid reaction to methylprednisolone is rare. Few clinicians have come across it.

I agree that it is unreasonable to ascribe the anaphylactoid response to methylprednisolone therapy with interferon β. Nevertheless, it remains the case that a man who had had numerous courses of methylprednisolone without adverse effect had...
anaphylactoid reactions to the drug soon after the introduction of interferon β, and that such an unusual event should alert us to the possibility that interferon β may have paradoxic effects. If we see only what we expect we run the risk of missing the truth.

DANIELA CLEAR
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BOOK REVIEWS


This slim volume is the result of a small meeting held towards the end of 1997 by a largely European group of scientists designed to explore recent advances in the treatment of some neurodegenerative conditions. The result is a highly eclectic collection of short chapters ranging from the general to highly specific, which overall makes the book hard to follow and thus recommend. For example the second chapter discusses a wide variety of different types of myelin mutant mice, whereas three chapters later we are treated to a discussion on the inhibitory effects of apoptosis on the proliferative potential of a Chinese hamster ovary cell line.

In addition the book tends to leap from clinical to scientific topics with no obvious linking sections; thus we move from a discussion on the newer dopamine agonists to others on animal models of multiple system atrophy and their treatment by neural transplantation. Indeed, the book, by presenting short, often unrelated topics, suffers from being misleading to the uninitiated reader. For example it begins with a chapter on neural precursors isolated from the rat spinal cord and their differentiation potential. This is an area of great current interest given the potential of these cells for repairing the damaged and diseased CNS. However this chapter, while, giving an insight to the field is bereft of companion chapters, and so it is not obvious to the newcomer how this chapter relates to embryonic stem (ES) cells, neural precursor cells from other mammalian species as well as those isolated from the adult CNS. Furthermore, it is not clear how the concepts of a current interest given to the potential of these cells for repairing the damaged and diseased CNS. However this chapter, while, giving an insight to the field is bereft of companion chapters, and so it is not obvious to the newcomer how this chapter relates to embryonic stem (ES) cells, neural precursor cells from other mammalian species as well as those isolated from the adult CNS. Furthermore, it is not clear how the concepts of a current interest given to the potential of these cells for repairing the damaged and diseased CNS. However this chapter, while, giving an insight to the field is bereft of companion chapters, and so it is not obvious to the newcomer how this chapter relates to embryonic stem (ES) cells, neural precursor cells from other mammalian species as well as those isolated from the adult CNS. 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In summary, the Atlas of Psychiatric Pharmacotherapy is clearly the result of a detailed and updated revision of the literature in all fields of psychopharmacology, from basic science to treatment of rare psychiatric conditions. It may be too complex to be used as the main or only source of knowledge by a doctor or by a clinician involved with everyday clinical practice, but is definitively a must for those academics involved in psychopharmacology teaching or research. Also, at home in other fields—for example, pharmacology, psychology, and neuroscience. Unfortunately, one possible problem of this book is that the tables, schemes, figures, and algorithms may be too complex for it to be used as a “quick reference by the busy clinician or someone without prior knowledge of the topic. It is possible, therefore, that the book could not reach these two stated target audiences. However, it is well suited to be used in various academic spheres (the third stated target). In an academic setting, this book will be used as a teaching tool or as a consultation book to find important details that are not readily available from other resources. Also, this book has two other minor shortcomings: the absence of an index and some misspellings.

CORRECTION

Sheppard DM, Bradshaw JL, Mattingley JB, Lee P. Effects of stimulant medication on the lateralisation of line bisection judgements of children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry 1999;66:57–63. In this paper, figs 2 and 3 were wrongly ascribed the legends for figs 4 and 5 and figs 4 and 5 were given the legends for figs 2 and 3.
Golf ball epilepsy

DAVID CHADWICK, DANIELA B CLEAR, PAUL ELDRIDGE and CONNOR MALUCCI

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