Immunoglobulins in very low birthweight premature infants

Sir,
Conway et al reported on the immunoglobulin supplementation of very low birthweight (VLBW) neonates. The IgG concentrations measured in the control group were, however, considerably higher than those reported for preterm babies born between the 29th and 32nd weeks of gestation. The higher absolute values might have originated from the different methods of determination and statistical analysis. Nevertheless, not only were the absolute concentrations higher but also the postnatal relative decrease in IgG concentration was less marked than expected.

These differences are especially interesting for us as in our unpublished follow up investigation on VLBW neonates we also found unexpectedly high immunoglobulin concentrations. As practically all VLBW neonates require at least one packed red cell transfusion in the neonatal period, so one possible factor in the background of a higher immunoglobulin concentration may be the influence of transfusions.

In order to elucidate whether packed red cell transfusions can alter immunoglobulin concentrations we measured the immunoglobulin content of 15 blood units used for transfusing babies of mean (SD) postconceptional age of 32-5 (3-4) weeks and postnatal age of 27 (13) days. The following concentrations were found (mean (SD)): packed cell volume, 60-1 (1-2)%; IgG, 10-0 (3-4) g/l; IgA, 1-43 (0-70) g/l; and IgM, 1-3 (1-65) g/l.

By knowing the amount of blood transfused (15 ml/kg) and the pretransfusion packed cell volume of the recipients, and by estimating the circulating blood volume to be 85 ml/kg the impact of the transfusion on serum immunoglobulin concentrations could be calculated. One packed cell transfusion theoretically increased the IgG concentration by 0-93 (0-40) g/l, IgA by 0-14 (0-09) g/l, and IgM by 0-12 (0-15) g/l. Certainly, after extravascular distribution of the immunoglobulins the effect is less marked, however, presumably still not negligible.

It is suggested that in VLBW neonates the ‘normal’ immunoglobulin concentrations reported may reflect not only endogenous production but exogenous intake by means of the transfusions as well.

References


T Decsi and M Fekete
Department of Paediatrics,
University Medical School,
József Au7, Pécs,
H-7633 Hungary

Cardiovascular collapse after verapamil in supraventricular tachycardia

Sir,
Kirk et al report the occurrence of severe hypotension and death after treatment of paroxysmal supraventricular tachycardia with verapamil. The fact that digoxin was also employed in three of the five cases is ignored. The interaction of verapamil and digoxin and their potential for producing in concert serious adverse effects and even death were reported previously. Likewise, it is important to emphasise the authors’ caution regarding the unpredictable effects of the combination of verapamil and proprano-
Immunoglobulins in very low birth-weight premature infants.

T Decsi and M Fekete

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