Use of cyclosporin A as a steroid sparing agent in cystic fibrosis

EDITOR,—In cystic fibrosis (CF) chronic respiratory infection is countered by an intense therapeutic intervention. Systemic steroids have been shown to improve lung function and reduce morbidity in patients with CF and improve pulmonary function in cystic fibrosis.

S CUNNINGHAM


Subnormal growth in children with Helicobacter pylori infection

Editor,—We read with interest the study by Choe and colleagues in which they investigated the effect of Helicobacter pylori infection and iron deficiency anaemia on growth, especially in pubescent children. In this study, height values were found to be below the 25th centile in 18 of 63 (28.6%) H pylori positive children. The prevalence rate of H pylori infection was 15.3% in children without iron deficiency anaemia and 31.3% in those with iron deficiency anaemia (p = 0.022). They also revealed that the mean height of subjects who had both H pylori infection and iron deficiency anaemia decreased significantly. They concluded that H pylori infection accompanied by iron deficiency anaemia,

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of centres</th>
<th>Total serum IgE (mg/ml)</th>
<th>Aspergillus precipitins</th>
<th>Aspergillus specific IgE</th>
<th>*Aspergillus fumigatus skin test</th>
<th>Blood eosinophils (&gt;500/mm³)</th>
<th>CXR infiltrates</th>
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</table>

*Six major criteria investigations.
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Harpenden,
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Growth monitoring

Editor—Garner and colleagues recently presented a much needed review of growth monitoring.2 This is a component of primary health care on which so muchfinance and health workers’ time is being expended. No doubt this review will stimulate more necessary trials.

However, they did not touch on one important aspect of growth monitoring—that is, whether health workers using growth charts comprehend the weight for age curve.3

Proctor (1978–1980) considered the growth chart line graph to be one of the more difficult subjects to teach. Graphic representation of numbers should not be taught to primary school teachers in these countries without the teacher to be able to teach it. Experience with postgraduate doctors in the 1970s suggested that a proportion could not complete a weight for age curve.4

Fortunately, an alternative method of weighing was developed to overcome this difficulty. This method involves weighing in or near the home, not in the clinic, with a Direct Recording Scale. With this, the parent sees a large spring stretching up their child’s chart, located in the home, as they release the child’s weight into the weighing trousers below the scale. With a ball pen, they then create the next point on the child’s growth curve through a hole in the pointer at the top of the spring. In this way, even unschooled parents can create their child’s growth curve. This time, it leads them and their relative to understand the weight for age curve.5

In one study among the pastoral Maasai in Kenya, action was taken by the parents to give an additional drink of milk to children whose weight for age was falling (Meeegan M. Personal communication, 1999).

H pylori infection is a chronic persistent infection, leading to diminished growth. Chronic gastric inflammation, dyspepsia, decreased nutritional intake, and malnutrition; the weight for age curve was faltering (Meegan M. Personal communication, 1999).


Detecting outbreaks of E coli O157 infection in nurseries

Editor—In their report of a serious outbreak of E coli O157 in a nursery in North Wales, Al-Jader and colleagues recommend that more than one child with more than one bowel movement in a bowel motion should trigger action including “informing and seeking the advice of public health agencies”.1 Using data on healthy children reported in the paper we can calculate the additional work that would be generated for the Public Health Department in the district where the outbreak occurred if this policy was implemented.

19 of well children on the ground floor of the nursery, six had more than one bowel motion on at least one of the half days sessions attended during the surveillance period.2 Well children attended on a median of six days during the period, giving an approximate total number of sessions attended of 228 (19x6=228). The probability of a well child having more than one bowel motion during any half day session was therefore about 0.026 (6/228). There are 385 nursery days and playgroups in North Wales, with an average of 23 children per nursery.3 In an average nursery the probability that two or more well children would have more than one bowel motion in a session on any one day is 0.12, equivalent to a false alarm every eight days.

Therefore, if the suggested policy was implemented, and incidents were reported to the Public Health Department, this would result in approximately 46 inappropriate calls per day (0.12x385)—that is, 230 per week. Even if the normal background rate was ten per day (0.12, equivalent to a false alarm every eight days), the outbreak needs to be reviewed.


Meningococcal disease due to W135: fresh public health concerns

Editor—The paediatric intensive care unit at St Mary’s Hospital in London admits more than 100 cases of meningococcal disease each year from over 50 different hospitals in the south east of England. Since 1992, the unit has treated over 650 patients with the disease,1 but had not treated a single case of serogroup W135 meningococcal infection until April 2000. We would like to report four children treated at our unit for meningococcal infection due to serogroup W135, type 2A, subtype P1.2, P1.5, within a one month period from April 2000. They had been vaccinated recently with meningococcal serogroup C conjugated vaccine, and had all been


Dr Salmon comments:

Children who attend out of home care are at increased risk for infectious diseases of which gastrointestinal tracts are among the most common.1 Numbered among these are VT + E coli O157 infections which, as this outbreak showed, can cause severe disease. The challenge is to identify disease early.

In this outbreak, given that the first two cases attended the nursery for two days after the onset of their disease on 21 August and the first case from the nursery was not reported until 1 September by which time 13 further symptomatic cases had occurred, our claim that 10–12 cases could have been prevented by taking further action, at this point, is straightforward. The toiletting records might have constituted sufficient evidence on which to act.

We list a range of possible responses, particularly when the bowel motion is loose or offensive (inquiring about symptoms at home, suggesting a visit to the family doctor, arranging a faecal sample for analysis, informing and seeking the advice of public health agencies). We were aware of the issue of specificity and did not suggest that all these activities should necessarily occur on every occasion that more than one child with more bowel motion was recorded. Most agree that faecal sampling needs, generally, to be encouraged.2 However, to combine the activities into a workable algorithm was beyond the scope of the report. Constructing an algorithm is worth attempting, however, since, as a starting point, a toiletting record constitutes a straightforward record used in a number of care settings.

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Letters, Book reviews, Corrections

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in contact with travellers returning from Mecca. The clinical features of these cases are outlined in table 1.

The children represent four out of 38 cases (with five fatalities) of serogroup W135 Neisseria meningitidis infection in England and Wales within the six week period from March to May 2000 (PHLS Meningococcal Reference Unit, personal communication), with hundreds of cases of the identical subtype being reported throughout Europe. 1 Saudi Arabia has reported over 225 cases, with almost 25% mortality to the end of April 2000. It is thought that this large outbreak of an unusual strain originated in Saudi Arabia, with the pilgrimage of a record 1.3 million people to the Haj between 15–18 March 2000. 2

A similar outbreak occurred in 1987, due to serogroup A, subgroup III. This also followed the yearly pilgrimage to Mecca, and spread throughout Europe, USA, and Africa over the next two years. 3 Requirements for pilgrims entering Saudi Arabia now include documented vaccination with meningococcal A and C polysaccharide preparation. This public health measure has been effective in irradiating serogroup A disease in these travellers. 4 A quadrivalent vaccine is available for serogroup W135 as well as serogroups A, C, and Y. This vaccine, however, is not licenced in the UK, and is only available on a named patient basis. This raises public health issues, including whether people returning from Mecca to the UK should be screened or given prophylaxis.

Even with the anticipated beneficial effects of the meningococcal C vaccination programme in England and Wales, it is important to remember that other serogroups of meningococci will continue to cause significant disease in the UK.

Until 1950, England was predominantly affected by epidemics of serogroup A meningococcal disease. The switch to serogroup B and C disease occurred after the second world war, and serogroup A disease is now rarely seen in the UK. Neisseria meningitidis has the potential to alter its capsular polysaccharide antigen through recombinational exchanges at the capsular locus. In his commentary in the Lancet in 1999, Martin Maiden expressed concern that new hyper-virulent strains of serogroups including B, W135, and Y may emerge as serogroup C disease is eliminated. 5 This recent outbreak of serogroup W135 infection does not seem to represent such selection pressure. However, it highlights the need for continued clinical, laboratory, and epidemiological vigilance for meningococcal infection, particularly now that there may be a theoretical risk of other serogroups becoming more prevalent as meningococcal serogroup C disease is controlled.

Table 1  Clinical presentation, severity and outcome

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case sex</th>
<th>Contact with travellers</th>
<th>Presentation</th>
<th>Resuscitation fluid*</th>
<th>Maximum inotropes</th>
<th>Mechanical ventilation (days)</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 10m/F</td>
<td>Grandmother</td>
<td>Petechiae, septicaemia</td>
<td>80 ml/kg fluid</td>
<td>No inotropes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discharged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 27m/M</td>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Purpura fulminans, septicaemia</td>
<td>350 ml/kg fluid</td>
<td>Adrenaline 2.2 µg/kg/min</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Peripheral gangrene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 4m/F</td>
<td>6 family members</td>
<td>Meningitis, seizures, no rash</td>
<td>No fluid</td>
<td>No inotropes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Discharged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 19m/F</td>
<td>2 Aunts</td>
<td>Purpura, septicaemia</td>
<td>90 ml/kg fluid</td>
<td>Dopamine 10 µg/kg/min</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Discharged</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Total resuscitation fluid required in first 24 hours

Pyridoxine dependent and pyridoxine responsive seizures

EDITORS—Divergences in existing guidelines on the prevention and treatment of cow’s milk allergy (CMA) in infants 6 seemed settled when a joint statement by the committees of ESPGAN/ESPAGAN appeared in ADC. 7 However, we take exception to some of the assumptions, which have been left open to challenge from both nutritional and allergological points of view. Our concern is that lactose free diets from birth may cause neurological problems in healthy children. Galactose is a functionally important component of milk allergens. It is unclear whether a lactose free diet plays a role in the clinical neurological abnormalities of children with galactosaemia. However, lactose is essential for patients with UDP-galactose-4-epimerase deficiency. Though rare, this disorder should be considered in the evaluation of the risk:benefit ratio and the costs of planning a prevention strategy for which the benefits are still unclear. In this context, issues of colonic ecology and malabsorption take second place. 8 The use of screening tests for errors of lactose metabolism as interpreted in the statement may also be misleading. The claim that “feeding lactose-free diets from birth . . . will cause false negative results in most neonatal screening tests for galactosaemia” overlooks the fact that these tests do not establish blood galactose levels but the presence/deficiency of the enzymes responsible for galactosaemia. 9 The assertion that “. . . formulas based on intact soy protein isolates are not recommended for the initial treatment of food allergy in infants, although a proportion of infants with cow’s milk protein allergy tolerate soy formula” is based on the ESPGAN Committee on nutrition and on the AAP recommendations. 10 While the former concerns itself with clinical gastrointestinal manifestations, the latter recommendations state in conclusion (point 8): “Most infants with documented IgE-mediated allergy to cow milk protein will do well on isolated soy protein-based formula”. Initial treatment for allergic disease is avoidance of the incriminated allergen. Soy formula has been recommended in treatment of CMA on grounds of efficacy, adequate nutrient intake, and cost. 11 In the absence of prospective studies comparing the allergenicity of cow’s milk hydrolysates against soy formulas in children with CMA, the rationale to alter this indication appears to be lacking.

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Letters, Book reviews, Corrections
suppression pattern. There was biochemical evidence of multi-organ damage. He was extubated on day 5 and discharged on day 16 on phenobarbitone. He continued to have frequent myoclonic seizures. At 6 months, phenobarbitone was replaced by sodium valproate with some initial benefit. By 7 months, he was having focal motor seizures affecting his right arm up to 40 times a day and additional atypical absences and tonic seizures. He also showed signs of an emerging spastic quadraparesis. EEG showed right sided spike and wave discharge with a frontal emphasis. At 8 months a trial of oral pyridoxine (30 mg/kg/day) was given. No seizures have been observed since pyridoxine was started. He is now 16 months old. He is maintained on pyridoxine 15 mg/kg/day; valproate has been discontinued. The EEG no longer shows spike and wave activity. The signs of spastic quadraparesis remain.

We have reviewed the notes of children attending The David Lewis Centre, a residential school for children with severe epilepsy. Children at The David Lewis Centre are referred from all over the UK and their early epilepsy management has been undertaken at many different centres. 31 children with intractable cryptogenic epilepsies, which started before they were 3 years old, were identified (dates of birth 1979–1992). Only one of these children was recorded as having received a trial of pyridoxine early in the evolution of their epilepsies. The true prevalence of pyridoxine responsive epilepsy is difficult to assess if the recommendations of Baxter are seldom applied. Giving pyridoxine can be diagnostic and therapeutic—not giving a trial of pyridoxine is common and can lead to a treatable cause of difficult epilepsy unreocgnised and inadequately treated.

Are sleep studies worth doing?

Editor,—If sleep studies are worth doing, they are worth doing well. The study of sleep responsive epilepsy is difficult. The true prevalence of pyridoxine early in the evolution of their epilepsy is unknown. Children at The David Lewis Centre, a residential school for children with severe epilepsy, have been observed since pyridoxine was started. At 8 months a trial of oral pyridoxine (30 mg/kg/day) was given. No seizures have been observed since pyridoxine was started. He also showed signs of an emerging spastic quadraparesis. EGG showed right sided spike and wave discharge with a frontal emphasis. At 8 months a trial of oral pyridoxine early in the evolution of their epilepsies. 31 children with intractable cryptogenic epilepsies, which started before they were 3 years old, were identified (dates of birth 1979–1992). Only one of these children was recorded as having received a trial of pyridoxine early in the evolution of their epilepsies. The true prevalence of pyridoxine responsive epilepsy is difficult to assess if the recommendations of Baxter are seldom applied. Giving pyridoxine can be diagnostic and therapeutic—not giving a trial of pyridoxine is common and can lead to a treatable cause of difficult epilepsy unreocgnised and inadequately treated.

Data presented do not justify pessimistic conclusions

Editor,—In a recent article, Cavadini and colleagues told us that during the past thirty years the youth in the US have shown a decrease in the percentage of energy from fat and, particularly, saturated fats. 1 2 Concern is also expressed about falling calcium intake, due to a decrease in consumption of dairy products. US milk intake has always been exceptionally high and, being rich in saturated fat, a reduction is probably desirable. However, the current lower intake still supplies levels of calcium much higher than those for children in other developed countries.

There seems little doubt that US children are growing fatter, but I am at a loss to see in what way their dietary intake explains this. Presumably the reduction in energy intake is often an even greater reduction in activity, but the effect is that, in composition terms, the diet of today’s adolescents, though supplying more energy than required for current levels of activity, seems healthier than it has ever been.

The old fashioned disciplinarian mother used to shout to her children in the next room “whatever you’re doing: stop it!”. This seems to be our attitude towards young people as a group. It is sad to see a scientific article falling back onto the accepted paradigm that the youth of today are decadent and unhealthy. Could the authors not have had the imagination to explore the meaning of these results and even suggest that some things might be improving instead of getting worse?

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Spacers and holding chambers: Not the last word, we hope

Editor,—Zac and colleagues compared homemade spacers with two commercially available valved holding chambers (VHCs) for the treatment of children with acute asthma. 1 We, as the manufacturer of one of the VHCs that was evaluated, acknowledge that the practice of using empty drink bottles is common in some countries (either by necessity or choice), but we are highly concerned about the support to the hypothesis, given by implication in this paper, that coffee cup or drink bottle spacers are as effective as properly designed add on devices.

In this paper, the production technique did not simulate the release of medication from a pressurised metered dose inhaler (pMDI). Instead, the technique created a radio labelled aerosol by pneumatic nebulisation into a bag (which would have acted as a particle pre-selector). This set up would not have reproduced accurately the ballistic component (poldispersed particles) that is inevitably released at actuation of a pMDI. It has already been shown that these particles are more effectively separated by a VHC than a spacer (with no valve). Had a pMDI containing the radio-labelled aerosol been used (as is the normal practice in gamma scintigraphic studies evaluating pMDI systems), we believe that the dynamic aerosol behaviour (inertial impaction of the ballistic component, turbulent deposition, etc) following actuation into the chamber would have been quite different to that observed by having patients drawing in the already formed aerosol from a nebuliser and breathing into a VHC. Simply put, the protocol more closely simulated a continuous jet nebuliser releasing a liquid phase aerosol into a bag that was then connected to a chamber/spacer device and may therefore be only a partial reflection of what occurs inside a VHC used with a pMDI.

A well designed holding chamber (with a valve) will retain a significant portion of the coarse component of the emitted dose (partic-

Given the wide prevalence of feeding problems in children and their potential impact on health, it is important for all health professionals working with children to gain an understanding of feeding difficulties. In several chapters of this book there is a refreshing focus on the role of organic factors in feeding problems, which may highlight the wide range of subtle organic features that can contribute to and exacerbate feeding difficulties in children. The impact of other factors on feeding is also covered—for example, the effect of temperament, appetite, growth, developmental stage, prior experience with foods, and cognitive development, all of which are critical in understanding each child’s feeding difficulty and creating appropriate intervention strategies.

The various theories of feeding difficulties from physiological (oral motor, regulatory, neurological), psychological (behavioural, cognitive behavioural, and psychoanalytical) and cultural perspectives are covered. These are discussed in reference to multidisciplinary teamwork and the development of both hospital and community feeding services. The chapter covering the psychoanalytical perspective sits somewhat oddly within the context of the book. Less helpful advice and practical intervention techniques stem from this chapter than the others, but perhaps those with an interest in psychoanalysis will find it an appealing diversion.

It is vital that health professionals in this field develop an understanding of the impact of cultural factors, from the effect of cultural feeding practices on feeding difficulties, to the perception and importance of food and feeding within cultures. This is critical in understanding the factors that contribute to the development and maintenance of feeding problems in children, and is also essential to facilitate culturally sensitive intervention strategies. The perspectives of Indian culture are discussed and whilst one text alone cannot cover the breadth of multicultural issues that are relevant to the UK population, there is useful advice on issues which are specifically related to cultural practices and those which are related to social disadvantage and poverty in general.

Whilst some chapters focus on clinical practice and opinion that may not appeal to an academic audience, practical advice, such as special issues in tube feeding, neurological impairment, and chronic illness, combined with generally sound theoretical discussion, makes this a useful resource for health professionals involved in the assessment or treatment of feeding difficulties.


Share prices of dot.com companies have plummeted because, we are told, there are too many players in the market place for them all to be viable. The dot.com bubble has burst. This may also be true of paediatric textbooks. Such thoughts might trouble the authors and publisher of the fourth edition of the ABC of One to Seven, were it not for the pictures it contains. Is there really demand for another general paperback text covering well trodden ground, with predictable text and liberal use of blue boxes to convey the impression that there is a lot more colour than is really the case? Perhaps not, but for those pictures. This book isn’t cheap, but maybe that’s because of the pictures. In short, this book is worth the investment for the pictures alone.

Medical students like to console themselves with thick books because many of us still hold fast to the well known belief that you can learn a lot about a subject by buying a “good book”, even without opening it. Perhaps the same is true of GPs; fat books with hardback covers are much more impressive shelf-fillers than paperback ones.

But what about when the time comes to learn paediatrics? We need something on which to hang the facts of any textbook, and we all know the daunting effect of long paragraphs of plain text on page after page. This is where pictures and diagrams come into their own, and the ABC of One to Seven has them in spades. They are almost always helpful and relevant—if not adding to the explanation, then proving the useful peg on which to hang a particular fact. Captions though, are few and far between. The reader can sometimes be left confused as to the purpose of a particular illustration. Several of the pictures appear two or three times and others are decidedly outdated. Ambulances and toys appear two or three times and others are decidedly outdated. Ambulances and toys.

This is no reference bible, and the text is simple and narrative. Facts are not flung at the reader, and the practical is emphasised over the theoretical. This is a book to demystify infancy and early childhood—the fear of the unknown can quickly be replaced with enthusiasm for such a fun subject area. The Colour Atlas of Kids: this bubble definitely remains intact.

JACKIE BLISSETT
School of Psychology, University of Birmingham

CORRECTION

In a recent letter by Russell and Gillett (Arch Dis Child 2000;85:146), the sentence: “The in house assays used for AGA and EmA were performed on 10–20 ml of serum or plasma; thus capillary samples were more than adequate.” should have read: “The in house assays used for AGA and EmA were performed on 10–20 microlitres of serum or plasma; thus capillary samples were more than adequate”. We apologise for this error.

Data presented do not justify pessimistic conclusions

C M WRIGHT

Arch Dis Child 2001 84: 89
doi: 10.1136/adc.84.1.89i

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