Rising incidence of type 1 diabetes in Scottish children, 1984–93

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Abstract

Objectives—To calculate the incidence of type 1 diabetes in Scottish children aged less than 15 years between 1984 and 1993; to examine changes in incidence; and to calculate the prevalence of diabetes at the end of this period.

Design—Three data sources were used to construct the Scottish Study Group for the Care of Young Diabetics register: active reporting of all new cases; reports from the Scottish Morbidity Register 1; and local registers.

Subjects—All children resident in Scotland diagnosed with primary insulin dependent diabetes mellitus when less than 15 years of age between 1984 and 1993.

Main outcome measures—Annual incidence and prevalence rate for Scotland; time trend in incidence over the 10 years; differences in incidence between the three different age groups; and completeness of the register.

Results—The average annual incidence for Scotland was 23.9/100 000 children. The prevalence rate was 1.5/1000 in 1993. A total of 2326 cases was identified from the three sources. Capture-recapture analysis suggests a case ascertainment of 98.6%. The annual incidence rates increased at a rate of 2% each year (rate ratio = 1.02, 95% confidence interval (CI) 1.00 to 1.03). The incidence was higher in boys than girls (rate ratio = 1.08, 95% CI 1.00 to 1.18), and the incidence rates increased with age: 15.3/100 000/ year for age 0–4 years, 24.4/100 000/year for age 5–9 years, and 31.9/100 000/year for age 10–14 years.

Conclusions—The incidence of type 1 diabetes in Scotland is increasing and the prevalence is relatively high. These findings have important implications for health service resource allocation. The Scottish Study Group for the Care of Young Diabetics’ register provides a base for monitoring and research.

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Type 1 diabetes in Scottish children

Table 1 Number of cases of type 1 diabetes in 1984–93 among children aged 0–14 years identified from active reporting, local registers, and SMR1 discharge data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Active reporting and local registers</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SMR1 discharge data</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1779</td>
<td>395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Estimated completeness: 98.6% (95% CI 98.0 to 99.1%).

SMR1 DISCHARGE DATA SET

This computerised register contains details of all non-psychiatric inpatient discharges from Scottish hospitals since 1968. This register is searched periodically to identify all children with a discharge diagnosis of diabetes. This list is then matched against the SSGCYD register list and all names missing from the SSGCYD list are traced. These ‘missing’ patients are traced through each hospital by writing to each consultant or the nurse specialising in diabetes, or the dietician. All genuine cases are then entered into the SSGCYD register. It should be noted that the SMR1 data will only have names of children that are admitted to hospital either at diagnosis or subsequently.

LOCAL REGISTERS

Most hospitals in Scotland maintain their own local lists of patients with diabetes; some are manual registers, whereas others are computerised. These local registers were used as the third data set for constructing the SSGCYD register. We checked the SSGCYD list against these registers by contacting hospitals in person, and the few ‘missing’ patients were added to the SSGCYD register. All hospitals in the region were contacted to use their local register if they had one. Most were visited in person between 1992 and 1994, whereas others were contacted through the consultant, nurse specialising in diabetes, or dietician. Through this thorough procedure we should have found all children diagnosed with diabetes between 1984 and 1993.

PREVALENCE

To calculate the prevalence, data for children diagnosed before 1984 were also used. The local registers were the most important source of prevalence data and completeness ascertained via SMR1 and the SSGCYD register. As a part of another study, all patients on the register were flagged with the General Register Office, which provides information on mortality and emigration. In this way the number of children aged less than 15 years living in Scotland on 31 December 1993 with a diagnosis of IDDM was calculated.

STATISTICAL METHODS

Incidence rates were calculated using the patients on the SSGCYD register and the estimated population each year by age and sex for Scotland published annually by the General Register Office for Scotland. The 1991 census population for Scotland was used to age standardise the annual incidence rates. The completeness of the register was estimated using capture-recapture analysis with active reporting and local registers were combined to give the primary source and SMR1 discharge data were used as the secondary source, both sources being statistically independent. Incidence was modelled using Poisson regression in EGRET,8 comparing incidence rates between boys and girls, between different age groups, and investigating linear trends over 10 years. The interaction between age group and sex was included to compare the distribution of age of incidence between sexes. The hypothesis that the age of incidence has changed over the 10 years was tested by adding the interaction between age group and the linear trend in year to the Poisson regression model, which included age, sex, and year effects. To investigate any seasonal variation in disease incidence Edwards’ method was used. This assumes the variation follows a sinusoidal pattern.9

Results

The SSGCYD register between 1984 and 1993 contained 2326 children aged less than 15 years. A total of 1931 patients (83.0%) were identified by active reporting and local registers and 2174 (93.5%) were identified from SMR1 discharge data. A total of 1779 cases was common to both sets of sources (table 1). Capture-recapture analysis suggested that these sources achieved 98.6% case ascertainment (95% confidence interval (CI) 98.0 to 99.1%). The 2326 cases detected between 1984 and 1993 gave an overall average annual incidence of 23.9/100 000/year.

The register consisted of 1239 boys (average annual incidence 24.8/100 000/year) and 1087 girls (average annual incidence 22.9/100 000/year). Table 2 shows the average annual incidence of type 1 diabetes during the 10 year period for boys and girls in five year age bands. In the Poisson model the difference in incidence between boys and girls was of borderline statistical significance at the conventional 5% level (rate ratio = 1.08, CI 1.00 to 1.18, p = 0.05). From table 2 it appears that the higher incidence in boys is mainly attributable to an excess in the 10–14 years age group, but the difference in age of diagnosis between sexes (tested by including the interaction between girls).
Table 3  Annual age standardised incidence rates of type 1 diabetes in 1984–93 among children aged 0–14 years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>All</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>22.2 (18.2 to 26.2)</td>
<td>23.4 (19.1 to 27.6)</td>
<td>22.7 (19.8 to 25.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>22.0 (18.0 to 26.1)</td>
<td>22.2 (18.0 to 26.4)</td>
<td>21.5 (18.4 to 24.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>23.3 (19.1 to 27.6)</td>
<td>19.2 (15.3 to 23.1)</td>
<td>21.1 (18.2 to 24.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>26.7 (22.1 to 31.2)</td>
<td>18.4 (14.5 to 22.3)</td>
<td>22.6 (19.6 to 25.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>26.7 (22.1 to 31.2)</td>
<td>18.0 (16.0 to 24.8)</td>
<td>23.1 (20.6 to 26.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>25.9 (21.3 to 30.4)</td>
<td>24.4 (20.0 to 29.0)</td>
<td>25.3 (22.2 to 28.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>24.2 (19.8 to 28.5)</td>
<td>25.7 (21.1 to 30.3)</td>
<td>24.9 (21.7 to 28.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>23.4 (19.1 to 27.7)</td>
<td>22.7 (18.3 to 27.0)</td>
<td>23.0 (20.0 to 26.0)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>25.4 (20.9 to 29.8)</td>
<td>27.0 (27.8 to 32.3)</td>
<td>26.4 (23.8 to 29.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>27.0 (22.4 to 31.5)</td>
<td>25.0 (20.5 to 29.5)</td>
<td>26.0 (23.3 to 28.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Age standardised to 1991 census population for Scotland.

**Discussion**

This study was conducted because of concern about the increasing incidence of type 1 IDDM in Scottish children. Two studies by Patterson and coworkers have shown an increasing incidence from 13.8/100 000/year between 1968 and 1976 and up to 21.0/100 000/year from 1977 to 1983 for children aged less than 19 years. The SSGCYD register was set up to address this issue. Our study found that the age standardised incidence had increased from 22.7/100 000 in 1984 to 26.0/100 000 in 1993.
with an average annual incidence of 23.9/100 000/year. This increase of about 2%/year, though small, is statistically significant, and the effect over 10 years is a large increase.

The Scottish IDDM incidence is similar to that of Scandinavian countries. The incidence of IDDM in Finland at 35.6/100 000 in 1988 is the highest in the world, although not statistically significant, estimated by Patterson and Hadden for the United Kingdom (UK) at 23.6/100 000. The ascertainment was estimated to be 99%, found 51 cases in that year from our three data sources, giving an age standardised incidence of 23.7/100 000 (crude rate = 23.6/100 000). The ascertainment as estimated by Patterson and Hadden for the Scottish Paediatric Surveillance Unit (BPSU) survey and agreed by Metcalfe and Baum in 1988 through the British Paediatric Surveillance Unit (BPSU) survey. They found 190 cases, giving an estimated incidence of 19.8/100 000, but we found 226 cases in that year from our three data sources, giving an age standardised incidence of 23.7/100 000 (crude rate = 23.6/100 000). The ascertainment as estimated by Patterson and Hadden for the BPSU survey and agreed by Metcalfe and Baum was 82%. Wadsworth et al., with an estimated ascertainment of 99%, found 51 cases in the 0–4 year age group in 1991, found three more cases. We also found six more cases than the total of 45 found by the BPSU study in 1988 among the 0–4 year age group. We therefore conclude that the three data sources used make the SSGCYD register more complete than other studies, which have underestimated the incidence of type 1 diabetes in Scotland.

The mean age of diagnosis decreased markedly between 1984 and 1993, but the mean age of the population also decreased, and taking this into account in the modelled, the age at diagnosis did not differ significantly over the 10 year period at the conventional 5% level. Our study also showed a peak incidence in the 10–14 year age group at the beginning of puberty, as shown by other studies. The sex ratio shows a slight imbalance, the rate ratio for boys to girls being 1.08 (95% CI 1.00 to 1.18). This reflects the higher incidence in boys (24.8/100 000) than girls (22.9/100 000). The seasonal variation shows a clear peak in autumn/winter and trough in the summer. This was true for both sexes, but is less marked in younger children. This confirms other reports.

The increasing incidence is of concern because of its health and resource implications. In the absence of a cure for diabetes these children will become major consumers of ophthalmic and renal services in the future. They will also require close monitoring in the childhood years and beyond. Services will have to be developed to meet these increasing demands. There is also great research potential and more studies are required to look for the environmental trigger factors giving rise to such a high incidence in Scotland against a genetic predisposition. Further studies are also needed to monitor the future trends to provide information about future need for health care provision.

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