Hypoglycaemia and hypothermia due to nimesulide overdose

Editor—Although toxicity due to chronic administration of nimesulide has been reported, to the best of our knowledge there is no report about poisoning due to a single ingestion. We report a 20 month old boy who accidentally took a high dose of nimesulide; 40 mg/kg, 8 times the recommended daily dose.

Physical examination was unremarkable. Laboratory findings, including hepatic and renal function, were normal, except for low to borderline glucose concentration (3.27 mmol/l) and mild acidosis (pH 7.35, bicarbonate 16.9 mmol/l). Gastric lavage with activated charcoal was performed. One third N saline in 5% glucose (1500 ml/m²/day) and ranitidine were started intravenously, and he was admitted to our intensive care unit. After eight hours, serum glucose concentration was 3.44 mmol/l, venous pH 7.28 and bicarbonate 18.5 mmol/l. His systolic blood pressure and body temperature fell to 60 mm Hg and 35.0 °C (axillary), respectively. The patient was rewarmed and the intravenous infusion rate increased to 2000 ml/m²/day. Six hours later, his serum glucose concentration was 4.44 mmol/l, venous pH 7.33, and bicarbonate 16.5 mmol/l. Body temperature and blood pressure rose and 20 hours after admission all vital signs became normal, mild acidosis resolving within 24 hours. He was discharged after 48 hours. Physical examination and laboratory findings were normal six days after discharge.

The most striking events in our patient were the development of hypotension and hypothermia. Hypothermia has been reported due to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs overdose, but hypothermia due to the antipyretic action of nimesulide has not been reported. Nimesulide produces a dose dependent antipyretic action in rats by inhibiting COX-2 but its effect under normothermic conditions is not known. Although it has been reported that nimesulide might be given to children with hypoglycaemia, it may cause hypoglycaemia in high doses.

We advise frequent monitoring of vital signs and being alert for hypoglycaemia and acidosis in managing acute nimesulide overdose.

E YAPAKCI
O ÜYŞAL
H DEMİRİLLİK
O OLGAR
N NAÇAR
H ÖZEN

Department of Pediatrics, Hacettepe University School of Medicine, Hacettepe University, Bisan Dalgarmaci Çocuk Hastanesi, Gastrenteroloji Utesi, 06100 Ankara, Turkey

E-mail: haconet@hacettepe.edu.tr


Port-A-Cath use in refractory seizure disorders

Editor,—The use of a totally implantable venous access system (Port-A-Cath) in children has become widespread in the last 15 years. We report a series of three children for whom the Port-A-Cath improved management of their refractory seizures.

Two patients both females with a diagnosis of severe myoclonic epilepsy of infancy and recurrent status epilepticus presented in the first year of life. Both had seizures, which were intractable to multiple anticonvulsants and became refractory to benzodiazepines. Intravenous midazolam was used initially, and to ease management of status epilepticus a Port-A-Cath was inserted at the age of 16 months in the first child and 13 months in the second. The third patient presented at 4 years with Lennox-Gastaut syndrome. Hospitalisation every 2–3 weeks became necessary for management of clusters of generalised tonic clonic seizures with intravenous medications. As seizures became resistant to multiple anti-convulsant therapies, intravenous immuno-globulin therapy once every 2 weeks was started with some success. Again venous access was difficult and a Port-A-Cath was implanted at 4½ years.

The first patient developed a candida albi- cans infection 9 months after insertion. Amphotericin B was given for 14 days and the Port-A-Cath removed. A second device was inserted after the infection was treated and remains in place 6 years later with no further complications. The second patient had her Port-A-Cath removed after 6 years and 5 months when the catheter blocked. A second device has just been inserted. The third patient has had no complications nine months after insertion.


Pica in sickle cell disease: “She ate the headboard”

Editor,—Within our sickle cell population, there are a small number of school aged children who eat sponge. Knowing that pica—the compulsive ingestion of non-nutritive substances—is more common in tropical countries where cultural and dietary factors play a role, it may not be a surprising finding. However geophagia (soil), pagophagia (ice), and trypophagia (hair) are the three main forms of pica that our patients have. It is also more common in deprived and neglected children. Neurologi- cal complications are not uncommon in sickle cell disease (SCD) but none of our children had cognitive impairment.

There is a recognised association between iron deficiency and pica, leading to debate as to which is cause and which effect. Natural sponge contains various proteins and minerals, and is often fortified with silica or calcium salts, however, synthetic sponge consists of cellulose alone. We wondered whether a craving of an unidentified salt fuels the eating of sponge, or whether the texture of sponge is simply orally stimulating.

In one study of pregnant women, 33% with pica had a history of childhood pica and 56% had a positive family history. In our children, four had a positive family history. Therefore, pica can be a response to a nutritional deficit.
Maternal nutrition and pregnancy outcome

Editor,—Symonds et al raise interesting issues about the potential use of animal models in examining the impact of nutrition during pregnancy on future risk of adult disease.1 However, their discussion of recent epidemiological research in humans includes several important factual inaccuracies. The authors imply that our analyses and those of Godfrey et al grouped women into categories of energy intake, and suggest that different results might have been obtained had “all the raw data points [been used] to determine potential relations between maternal nutrition and birth weight”. Yet as clearly indicated in both papers,1,2 this is precisely the analysis that was conducted. For information, figure 1 shows the relationship of maternal energy intake to birth weight in our study. In each paper, the cut points used in tables to illustrate the relationships between energy intake and birth weight were neither “unclear” nor “arbitrary” but were, as stated, tertiles. Symonds et al draw attention to the “striking difference” in energy intake between our study and that of Godfrey et al whilst also suggesting that we should combine our data in a meta-analysis. We argue that the differences are not particularly striking given the different methodologies used for dietary assessment. It would not be appropriate to combine in a meta-analysis data collected in contrasting ways from women at different stages of pregnancy. In any case, our study individually has sufficient statistical power to detect clinically important effects.

In a number of animal experiments above observational epidemiology in humans, Symonds et al confuse two separate issues. First, there is the biological interesting question of whether maternal diet can influence the outcome of pregnancy. This has already been demonstrated in animals. Secondly, there is the question of whether maternal diet influences the outcome of human pregnancy. This question is of clinical and public health importance. It cannot be answered by animal experiments (unless one were to make the dubious argument that the errors associated with extrapolating data from animal models to humans are less than those from using self-reported data on human dietary intake). We do not argue that maternal energy intake can never be associated with birth weight. Under extreme circumstances, such as those in the animal experiments cited by Symonds, or in Third World countries, it may be. However, this is no basis for suggesting has any importance to populations in industrialised countries.

M ROBERTS-HAREWOOD
S C DAVIES
Department of Haematology, Central Middlesex Hospital, London NW10 3NS
marilyn_rae@doctors.org.uk


Nitrous oxide and vitamin B12

Editor,—The paper by Kanagasundaram et al on the use of nitrous oxide to alleviate pain, and anxiety during painful procedures fails to mention the effect of this gas on cobalamin metabolism. Nitrous oxide inactivates cob(II)alamin, the active derivative of vitamin B12, and essential cofactor for the transfer of the methyl group from methylenetetrahydrofolate to homocysteine to form methionine. For subjects with good body stores of cobalamin this effect is unimportant, but no-one using this agent should remain unaware of the potentially devastating complications in the nervous system of using nitrous oxide in subjects who are of borderline or deficient vitamin B12 status. Onset of subacute combined degeneration affecting the brain and spinal cord is a well documented event when individuals with low body stores of cobalamin are exposed to nitrous oxide.1

There is a long list of situations which put children at risk of cobalamin deficiency—for example, diets low in animal products, synthetic feeding of any description, small bowel malformation, any prolonged illness with disturbance of feeding behaviour, especially if combined with increased metabolic demands—for example, systemic malignancy or chemotherapy. Children with chronic conditions often need painful procedures, and depleted cobalamin stores may not be apparent unless measurements of serum B12 are made routinely. What is more, repeated use of nitrous oxide depletes the body stores of cobalamin even in well people. Given the scale of use which would result from routine use of nitrous oxide in children undergoing painful procedures, there should be real concern about the potential for an accident in a child with occult cobalamin deficiency. The message must be: never forget vitamin B12 when thinking of using nitrous oxide.

ISABEL SMITH
Clinical Audit Department, Great Ormond Street Hospital, Great Ormond Street, London WC1N 3JH
smi@is.gsh.nhs.uk


The outcome of specialist registrars in the southwest region

Editor,—The UK national directive is to increase consultant paediatric numbers substantially over the next 5–10 years which requires the delivery of suitably trained doctors. Higher specialist training in paediatrics over five years underpins the increase in the number of trainees who will produce more consultants than there are posts, so trainee numbers will still have to be reduced. The southwest regional training committee has expressed concern that trainees are not completing training within five years for a variety of reasons. We therefore reviewed the training times and outcome of the 90 specialist registrars (SpRs) who have trained in our region since the introduction of the Calman training scheme.

The impact of the high proportion of women entering paediatrics needs to be addressed. Our review confirms that 29% of trainees are training flexibly, which will increase their training time for anything up to 10 years. All these are in the flexible training schemes that require at least 20% sessions per week. In regions where trainees have access to the retainer scheme and train for only two sessions per week, training times will be even further extended. Also our training committee is concerned that five SpRs have resigned before completing training. Four of these are women who resigned because, despite working part time, they felt that the career process was incompatible with family life.

Of the trainees who trained flexibly and who have obtained consultant posts, four have chosen to work as part time consultants. The other two would have done so had the opportunity been available. Female trainees will have to train for the full five years to be sure of obtaining a consultant position but also to remain competitive for the remaining time.

Given the scale of use which would result from routine use of nitrous oxide in children undergoing painful procedures, there should be real concern about the potential for an accident in a child with occult cobalamin deficiency. The message must be: never forget vitamin B12 when thinking of using nitrous oxide.
maternity leave, time out to undertake essential training in specialties other than paediatrics (for example, anaesthetics for those training in paediatric intensive care), and flexible training. We do not operate a lenient policy for out of programme experience (OOPEx) or leave of absence. We allow OOPEx only for experience that will count towards training. No more than one year is allowed except for those entering an MD or PhD programme, and only four trainees have taken more than one year for research prior to CSST. Moreover, we insist that training in locum appointment for training (LAT) posts in our own region in core paediatrics does count towards CSST. Therefore, in other regions where more liberal policies are operated, or there are more trainees in research posts, training times may be even longer.

Having obtained their CSST, only half of our trainees have currently obtained consultant posts; 75% of the remainder have sought training elsewhere as post-CSST PhD trainee, lecturer posts, fellowships abroad, or training in another specialty. Therefore the total average training time is further extended. The remaining 25% are locum consultants awaiting a suitable post becoming available. All are geographically restricted and some are also specialty restricted.

Our review would therefore suggest that there is a considerable discrepancy between the number of national training numbers issued and the numbers of doctors wishing, or eligible, to take up consultant posts five years later. These issues need to be taken into consideration in manpower planning and in designing the national service framework for the future.

MARY MCGRAVE
Regional advisor in paediatrics and chairman of the southwest regional paediatric training committee

Adrenaline syringes: community perspective

EDITOR,—We read with interest the paper by Unsworth regarding the over prescribing of adrenaline syringes. We are sure we are not the only community paediatric team who have similar concerns, although perhaps from a different perspective. Dr Unsworth writes of the safety issues. We have more experience of the practical problems.

Thanks to the availability of prompt training for school staff by community personnel, it is now rare for a child to actually be excluded from school because they have an adrenaline injection device. However, they may very well be excluded from other activities such as guide camp or trips abroad.

There is also the increasing problem of young people with adrenaline injection devices moving on to college or work places. Who should train staff there?

Other problems with adrenaline injection devices in our local community include two being lost on the bus, and one being accidentally fired into the interphalangeal joint of a child's thumb with the needle becoming bent like a fish hook.

There is also the issue of keeping them in date. Parents often forget to renew them, particularly those kept in school. Whilst it does not need to be kept in a refrigerator, adrenaline does deteriorate in warm conditions, and injection devices should be checked to make sure the adrenaline inside remains clear and colourless.

Often, an adrenaline injection device has been prescribed with no demonstration to the child or family on how to give it, nor when to give it. Surely adrenaline should also be prescribed in every case? In most children, it is the only medication, which is going to be needed. How can we then ensure that they know on when to call an ambulance. They could easily make the mistake of trying to take a deteriorating child to hospital in their own car, instead of calling a paramedic ambulance, or even assume that they do not need to go to hospital at all if they have given adrenaline. As Dr Unsworth points out, the adrenaline injection does not always save the child's life.

We would suggest that when an adrenaline injection device is prescribed it must be demonstrated to both the parent and child (if the child is old enough). A dummy pen is helpful for this. Demonstration should be repeated with each repeat prescription of the device. The child and their family should have a written management protocol, including instructions on expected symptoms, when to give adrenaline, when to call an ambulance, and when to give adrenaline. Such a protocol can then be passed rapidly to the community paediatric team to support the prompt training of school staff.

It is worth remembering that clinical responsibility for the safe administration of a drug rests with the prescriber.

T WOLFF
C RUMNEY
Birmingham Specialist Community Trust, Child and Family Centre, Moors Road, Birmingham B11 2PR, UK
toni@stetchouse.freeserve.co.uk

1 Unsworth DJ. Adrenaline syringes are vastly over prescribed. Arch Dis Child 2001;84:110–11.

Controversies in paediatrics?

EDITOR,—I was very disappointed to see that the first contribution to the Controversy series was not written by a paediatrician. There are plenty of controversial topics in paediatrics, including the one cited. There are also plenty of paediatricians perfectly qualified to engage in such a formal debate about the topic included in the current issue. The absence of a contrasting viewpoint in the same issue suggested to me the feature should be called “Opinion” rather than “Controversy” because the article is not a balanced review of the current state of allergy practice. The BPA and latterly RCPCH have championed for decades the holistic approach to the care of children. Paediatricians are best placed to assess the integrated needs of a child with medical problems. This principle is very relevant to developing areas of specialisation in which there is short supply of expert advice, such as in allergy. Paediatric allergists assess the impact of the diagnosis on many non-medical facets of a child's life, including family lifestyle, integration into schools and peer groups, and the facilitation of appropriate independence from parental supervision. It is tiring to have to rehearse the arguments for the adequate protection of subjects at risk of anaphylaxis. Epinephrine (as all doctors should now be calling adrenaline) is not the only help given in clinic to families with an allergic child. It is part of the integrated management plan, which appears to be effective though difficult to measure.

It is very hard to prove that epinephrine saves lives and I agree that the notion of the “number needed to treat” with epinephrine to prevent a death from anaphylaxis is very high. Unsworth's title suggests that this very high number (my phrase) is too high. How has he measured that? What is too many? He quotes a prevalence of about 1% of American children having peanut allergy. That is approximately 3 million subjects. We do not restrict insulin syringes to just a few insulin dependent diabetics because diabetes is so common that we cannot adequately care for all of them. Every allergic child has the right to best available care, which is not restricted to the first 100 through the clinic door (if they can find an allergy clinic).

Laparotomy will not save every patient with a leaking aortic aneurysm. Antidote to adrenaline will not save every person who has anaphylaxis. Anaphylaxis is a critical situation in which prompt administration of epinephrine may (but occasionally may not) save a life. I think it unarguable that it is better to self treat and probably survive than not self treat and possibly die. Unsworth quotes one early paper about anaphylaxis from the US and more recent British data. These papers all go to me more than the recent reviews used due to unavailability or inappropriate training and patient confusion, rather than that epinephrine is useless or dangerous. Most subjects did not have epinephrine available, several of the deaths reported by Pumphrey were due to incorrect use of available epinephrine. In addition, epinephrine appears to be more dangerous in the hands of doctors who give it IV than in the hands of allergy subjects who self treat. I commend your readers look at the report on the latest series of food related deaths.

In the absence of any perfect predictive test, allergists are confined to basing risk of future severe reactions on just a few variables.

The first is a history of previous severe reactions. The majority of peanut allergies have had a severe reaction in the past and more than 60% have asthma, the second known association with severe reactions. According to current opinion, then, even after just one reaction to peanut most subjects are considered at risk of severe future reactions. Many minor reactors to peanut progress to more severe reactions and new peanut allergy is confirmed by this convincingly. I do not think there are adequate data to change my practice from needing a very good reason not to prescribe epinephrine to most but not all subjects who have reacted to peanut, a food known to be associated with a risk of a severe allergic reaction.

Doctors must remember epinephrine is prescribed to be available for response to infrequent exposure at an uncertain future date, not to be taken four times a day. I have referred to this in the past as analogous to wearing a seatbelt on every car trip, every day, even though a serious car accident is unlikely on any individual day.

Unsworth is not up to date in his comments about the diagnosis of IgE-mediated allergy. There are strong data from huge series of challenges, about the negative predictive values of the tests used in allergy clinics. Unsworth does not even mention formal challenges, the cornerstone of modern food allergy practice. The allergist would prescribe an epinephrine kit on the basis of a positive SPT in the absence of a significant historical or formal challenge.

Children and adults at risk of food related anaphylaxis have enough of life's pleasures denied to them. The provision of epinephrine...
kits allows normal life to go on, involving school overnight stays at friends, camping, and other normal activities of childhood. Anecdotally, parents seem to me less stressed than when they are. I have never met a parent who reported being more scared of the epinephrine kits than of the prospect of allergen exposure (with or without epinephrine available).

Families must be taught when to use epinephrine and how to use autoinjectors. Until doctors can tell families that anaphylaxis will never happen we should continue to empower families, ensuring they are ready to respond best they can to the disaster that allergen exposure represents. When anyone develops a real treatment for food related anaphylaxis I can stop prescribing epinephrine kits to people who currently need them.

J HOURIHANE
Division of Infection, Inflammation and Repair, University of Southampton, Mailpoint 218, Tremona Road, Southampton SO16 6YD, UK


Appropriate prescription of epinephrine remains the best available treatment

EDITOR.—Epinephrine kits enable a food allergic child at risk of anaphylaxis to lead a normal life and participate in childhood activities that could easily be denied by a parent terrified of another allergen exposure. Avoidance of allergens rather than rescue epinephrine therapy is the basis of current management of food allergy. However, unexpected exposures are inevitable. Fifty eight per cent of children followed for five years experienced adverse reactions from accidental peanut exposure. Peanut is the most common food allergens causing anaphylaxis and perversely is still too often, under-used, in food processing. Anaphylaxis related to foods most commonly occurs in patients who have had previous severe reactions. However, minor initial reaction does not exclude a subsequent severe reaction to peanut. Any person still of anaphylaxis deserves the best available protection. It is reasonable to always have two Epipens available both at home and at school. A second Epipen provides back up if a faulty technique is used or one syringe is damaged. Anaphylaxis may be biphasic, recurring in 3% of children admitted with anaphylaxis.

As advocates of children, paediatricians are unlikely to hand out epinephrine syringes without due consideration of the impact on the child and his or her family. A comprehensive plan with written information is essential for any child seen with a food allergy whether or not epinephrine is prescribed. Sicherer et al showed 20% of children did not carry epinephrine outside the home and only 55% had unexpired epinephrine on them. However, successful demonstration was associated with repeat prescriptions, membership of a lay organisation for food allergy, and being reviewed by a specialist. Training packages for schools such as that devised by Vickers in Cambridge are valuable.

Unsworth states that “Community use should be much more restricted with increased involvement and reliance on trained medical staff”. Food allergy is the most common cause of anaphylaxis in children outside hospital. Early recognition and use of epinephrine is vital for successful outcome. The median time to respiratory or cardiac arrest was thirty minutes when unrecognised anaphylaxis in series.

Surely this implies that the community is the setting where epinephrine should be given by appropriately trained parents and carers to a food allergic child with signs of anaphylaxis. Parents should be empowered as limited resources prevent medical staff being present immediately. Indeed, epinephrine IV by trained medical staff also appears to be more hazardous than the use of epinephrine in allergic patients.

In the absence of any other treatments for food related anaphylaxis, the considered use of epinephrine kits as part of an integrated management plan is the best choice.

J ABAY
Southampton General Hospital, Tremona Road, Southampton SO16 6YD, UK
julieabay@hotmail.com