Urogenital abnormalities in male children with cystic fibrosis

H Blau, E Freud, H Mussaffi, M Werner, O Konen, V Rathaus

Arch Dis Child 2002;87:135–138

Background: Congenital bilateral absence of the vas deferens (CBAVD) is presumed to occur prenatally and is present in over 99% of adult males with cystic fibrosis (CF).

Aims: To describe ultrasonic features in male children with CF. We aimed to describe urogenital anomalies, comparing pancreatic sufficient and insufficient CF patients.

Methods: Pelvic and scrotal ultrasonography were performed in 12 boys with CF aged 2–12 years and 16 age matched healthy controls.

Results: Nine patients had pancreatic insufficiency (PI): seven had two severe mutations and two had unknown mutations. Three boys were pancreatic sufficient (PS), two with splicing mutations (5T and 3849+10kb C–T respectively) and borderline sweat tests. Seminal vesicles were visualised in 5/12 patients and 8/16 controls, compared to non-visualisation reported in all adults with CBAVD. Testicular microlithiasis was found in 4/18 PI, 0/6 PS, and 0/32 control testes, compared to 0.6–1.4% in healthy males and 15% in CF adults. 7/18 PI, 4/6 PS, and 0/32 control testes were smaller than predicted for age. The epididymal head was non-homogeneous with cysts, hypo- or hyper-echogenicity in 5/18 PI, 1/6 PS, and 0/32 control testes.

Conclusions: Genital abnormalities may occur early in CF, but are less common than described in adults. They are found more often in pancreatic insufficient than in pancreatic sufficient CF patients. However, a positive finding, if present, may aid in the diagnosis of the latter. A larger longitudinal study is recommended to better define the onset and progression of urogenital abnormalities.

Cystic fibrosis (CF) is caused by mutations of the CFTR gene, which cause abnormal chloride concentration across the apical membrane of epithelial cells in the airways, pancreas, intestine, sweat glands, and the male genital system. Congenital absence of the vas deferens (CBAVD) is present in 99% of adult males with CF. However, penetrance of this phenotype is variable in adult males with CF and pancreatic sufficiency.

While the ultrasonic appearance of the adult male reproductive tract in cystic fibrosis (CF) has been well described, there is little information regarding sonography of the urogenital tract in male children with CF. Interestingly, in fetuses aborted at 12–18 weeks with two severe CF mutations, the vas deferens was histologically normal, suggesting that CBAVD in CF may develop with time, because of inspissation of secretions and secondary atresia, rather than agenesis. It remains unclear at what stage this occurs.

We performed a small cross sectional study of male prepubertal children with CF, to determine the presence and severity of abnormalities as visualised by sonographic examination of the urogenital tract. Findings were compared for pancreatic sufficient and insufficient subjects.

METHODS

Patient selection
Twelve boys with cystic fibrosis up to age 12 years were selected at random from the Kathy and Lee Graub Cystic Fibrosis Center, Schneider Children’s Medical Center of Israel. As a control group, 16 healthy boys of similar ages underwent sonographic examination by the same paediatric radiologists. In all cases, parents gave informed consent. Findings were compared to published normal paediatric values.

Sonographic examination
Sonographic examination was performed by an experienced radiologist at the Pediatric Radiology Unit, Sapir Medical Center. Imaging of the urinary tract and scrotum was performed using an HD5 5000 SonoCT (ATL) system. A convex 2–5 or 5–8 MHz transducer was used for the abdominal imaging, depending on the age and body habitus of the children. A 5–12 MHz linear transducer was used for the scrotal examination. The testes were examined after elevation and immobilisation by gently placing a rolled up towel posterior to the scrotum in a vertical position between the legs.

Morphology of kidneys, ureters, bladder, seminal vesicles, inguinal canal, testes, and epididymides were recorded and compared to normal findings in children. Dimensions of testes were measured and compared to predicted values for length and volume. Volume was calculated using the simplified formula of (length × width × thickness × 0.65). We elected not to perform rectal ultrasound because of the more invasive nature of this test.

Clinical assessment
The following data were recorded for the 12 boys selected: age, height, and weight percentile at the time of examination; sweat chloride concentrations; pulmonary function tests performed using a Medgraphics spirometer in all boys able to cooperate; and Shwachman score calculated from the clinical state and chest x-ray findings. The patients were divided into two groups: pancreatic insufficient (PI) and pancreatic sufficient (PS) according to their pancreatic function. For this purpose, pancreatic insufficiency was defined as a coefficient of fat absorption (as calculated from recorded dietary fat intake and a three day faecal fat collection) of <93% and/or a

Abbreviations: CBAVD, congenital bilateral absence of the vas deferens; CF, cystic fibrosis; PI, pancreatic insufficiency; PS, pancreatic sufficiency
facial elastase of ≤200 µg/g stool. Boys with levels above these were termed pancreatic sufficient (PS).

**Mutation analysis**

All patients were screened for the CFTR mutations previously identified in the Israeli CF population.

**RESULTS**

**Clinical phenotype and correlation with CFTR mutations**

Patients with pancreatic insufficiency

Nine boys were shown to be pancreatic insufficient (PI) (table 1). Seven of these were homozgyous or compound heterozygotes for the genotypes ∆F508, W1282X, G542X, S549R, and 405+1G→A. These mutations have previously been associated with severe disease including pancreatic insufficiency, early age at diagnosis, and higher sweat chloride concentrations.

Two brothers of Arab Moslem origin had a similar classic CF genotype but no identified mutations. PI patients all had sweat chloride concentrations >65 mmol/l. Clinically they all had evidence of CF related lung disease as well as pancreatic insufficiency. However, as is now frequently the case in young children, they were in excellent clinical condition, as shown by Shwachman score, pulmonary function, and nutritional state.

Patients with pancreatic sufficiency

Three boys were pancreatic sufficient (PS) (table 2). Two of these patients had the genotypes 3849+10kb C→T and the 5T polymorphism respectively, which are associated with altered CFTR splicing and variable CF phenotype.

Urogenital sonographic findings

The kidneys, ureters, and bladder were normal in all patients. Abnormalities of epididymis and testes were seen, even in some of the youngest boys. However, several patients in both PS and PI groups had normal anatomy as visualised by ultrasound. Findings are summarised in table 3 for PI patients and table 4 for PS patients.

**DISCUSSION**

Infertility in adult CF males was first described in 1968. Urogenital pathology includes absence or atrophy of the vas deferens, and seminal vesicles. Congenital absence of the vas deferens (CBAVD) with azoospermia appears to be the most constant feature in CF, even when clinical scores are excellent. Furthermore, even in adult males with a mild CF phenotype, obstructive azoospermia has been suggested as a major diagnostic criterion.

This small cross sectional study is the first to describe ultrasonic features in male CF children. As the clinical distinction between the spermatic cord and vas is more difficult in infants and children than in adults, genital ultrasound is essential for any definition of reproductive tract pathology, short of direct exploration. We therefore examined the urogenital tract in boys with CF.

Little is known of the onset or natural progression of CF genital pathology in children. In a study of 12 and 18 week aborted fetuses with CF, the male genital tract was shown to develop normally at first. The vas deferens appeared to develop normally at first. The vas deferens appeared to be the most common finding in both groups of patients, with azoospermia in the majority of cases. However, in 5/18 cases of PI patients and 7/18 cases of PS patients, the vas deferens appeared normal or were present bilaterally. There were no cases of testicular microlithiasis in these boys, and in one case was present bilaterally.

Spermatic cord anomalies included a non-homogeneous appearance, areas of hyperechogenicity, and epididymal cysts, were seen in 5/18 PI and 1/6 PS patients, but in none of the controls.

Testicular microlithiasis was found in 4/18 testes of PI patients, and in one case was present bilaterally. There were no cases of testicular microlithiasis in six testes of PS patients or 32 testes of healthy controls. In the CF patients, testes were often smaller than predicted for age: 7/18 in PI patients and 4/6 in PS patients. All 32 testes in healthy controls were within predicted normal values for age.

Abnormalities within the epididymis and testicular microlithiasis were found in the same patient. Seminal vesicle visualisation was less consistent, in both CF patients and controls, and non-visualisation could occasionally have been related to technical factors such as incomplete filling of the bladder.

**Table 1** Genotype and clinical features in pancreatic insufficient boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pt no.</th>
<th>Age (y)</th>
<th>Sweat chloride</th>
<th>CFTR mutations</th>
<th>FEV₁</th>
<th>Wt</th>
<th>Ht</th>
<th>Sh. score</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>W1282X/405+1G→A</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>W1282X/W1282X</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>W1282X/G542X</td>
<td>105%</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>W1282X/ΔF508</td>
<td>112%</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>S549R/S549R</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>W1282X/ΔF508</td>
<td>102%</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>W1282X/ΔF508</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>98</td>
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</table>

FEV₁, forced expiratory volume in 1 second; Wt, weight, percentile for age; Ht, height, percentile for age; Sh. score, Shwachman score.

**Table 2** Genotype and clinical features in pancreatic sufficient boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pt no.</th>
<th>Age (y)</th>
<th>Sweat chloride</th>
<th>CFTR mutations</th>
<th>FEV₁</th>
<th>Wt</th>
<th>Ht</th>
<th>Sh. score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>∆F508/3849+10kb C→T</td>
<td>106%</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>∆F508/unknown</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>W1282X/5T</td>
<td>115%</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FEV₁, forced expiratory volume in 1 second; Wt, weight, percentile for age; Ht, height, percentile for age; Sh. score, Shwachman score.
Table 3: Ultrasonic findings in pancreatic insufficient boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pt no.</th>
<th>Age (y)</th>
<th>Seminal vesicles</th>
<th>Testicular length (cm)/volume (ml) R</th>
<th>Testicular micro lithiasis</th>
<th>Epididymis</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.4/0.4 (&lt;)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.8/0.9 (nl)</td>
<td>2.0/0.7 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.6/0.5 (&lt;)</td>
<td>2.2/0.8 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>1.6/0.7 (&lt;)</td>
<td>2.1/0.8 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>1.8/0.9 (nl)</td>
<td>2.7/3.0 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.9/0.9 (nl)</td>
<td>2.2/0.8 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.6/0.8 (nl)</td>
<td>1.7/0.8 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.9/0.9 (nl)</td>
<td>2.7/3.0 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>2.0/1.4 (nl)</td>
<td>1.5/1.2 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R, right; L, left; nl, normal; <, smaller than normal for age; ech, hypechogenic; nhom, non-homogenous; V, visualised; NV, non-visualised.

Table 4: Ultrasonic findings in pancreatic sufficient boys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pt no.</th>
<th>Age (y)</th>
<th>Seminal vesicles</th>
<th>Testicular length (cm)/volume (ml) R</th>
<th>Testicular micro lithiasis</th>
<th>Epididymis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>1.5/0.5 (&lt;)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>NV</td>
<td>1.2/0.5 (&lt;)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>V</td>
<td>2.4/4.6 (nl)</td>
<td>2.7/8.0 (nl)</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R, right; L, left; nl, normal; <, smaller than normal for age; V, visualised; NV, non-visualised.

healthy controls, but with secretions filling the mid vas. Intact kidneys and ureters in our study as well as in patients with CBAVD and CFTR mutations further indicate that the mesonephric duct is normal in early embryonic development. Although genital abnormalities in CF have been found from birth by autopsy and surgical exploration, the genital tract may be normal histologically in neonates and older children.

In this study, ductal genital abnormalities appeared less frequently than described in adults, although they were found at any age. This suggests the possibility that lesions progress with time. Most notably, the seminal vesicles were visualised in about half of both PS and PI boys, similar to our findings in healthy controls, but with secretions filling the mid vas. Intact kidneys and ureters in our study as well as in patients with CBAVD and CFTR mutations further indicate that the mesonephric duct is normal in early embryonic development. Although genital abnormalities in CF have been found from birth by autopsy and surgical exploration, the genital tract may be normal histologically in neonates and older children.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study and the Kathy and Lee Graub Cystic Fibrosis Center are generously supported by a grant from the Wachs family foundation.

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ARCHIVIST

Surgery for both hips in severe cerebral palsy

Up to 60% of children with quadriplegic cerebral palsy have unstable hips. Bilateral subluxation or dislocation of the hip may ensue and is often accompanied by pelvic obliquity and spinal deformity. The “windswept” deformity frequently develops with posterior subluxation of the adducted hip and anterior displacement of the opposite, abducted, hip. Hip pain may become intractable and care difficult. An orthopaedic team in Bristol (KL Owners and colleagues. Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery 2001; 83:1161–7) has assessed the results of bilateral hip surgery.

They reviewed the notes of 30 children (60 operated hips, 18 girls, mean age 7.7 years) who had simultaneous bilateral combined soft tissue and bone surgery between 1991 and 1997. In 19 children the cerebral palsy was classified as dystonic and in 11 hypertonic. All had windswept deformity, 20 to the right and 10 to the left. The indications for surgery were increased asymmetry, radiological subluxation or dislocation, or pain. All patients had bilateral femoral varus derotation osteotomies and selected patients had bilateral or unilateral (adducted hip) acetabuloplasty. All hips were fully reduced at the end of operation. Most patients had release procedures involving psoas, adductor, glutus maximus, or tensor fascia lata muscles. A full hip spica was applied for 6 weeks after operation and each patient went home with a spica transporter.

Follow up assessments were made at an average of 3 years. The mean range of combined abduction and adduction in flexion increased from 97° to 135° and fixed flexion decreased from 15° to 8°. In most patients, however, the windswept deformity did not change significantly. Of 50 hips with complete pre- and postoperative x rays 36 were subluxed or dislocated before operation and eight were subluxed afterwards. The overall level of mobility improved in a few patients. Thirteen patients had hip pain before operation but only two of these continued to have pain after operation. Three patients had supracondylar fractures of the femur postoperatively, one had trochanteric bursitis, one a sinus over a plate, and one a plastron sore. Twenty-three of 25 carers said the child was easier to handle and 22 expressed overall satisfaction with the management of their child.

Bilateral bone and soft tissue surgery may relieve pain and make care easier for children with severe quadriplegia, windswept deformity, and displaced hips.