EFFECT OF AN ANTI-HISTAMINE IN RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

BY

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In a recent article Levy (1951) records the treatment with an anti-histamine (Phenergan) of a small number of cases of infective arthritis and arthritis in Reiter’s disease treated in a military hospital in Singapore. In his series of seven cases, six had a recent previous history of purulent urethritis, one having pyuria in addition, and the seventh had a recent previous history of bacillary dysentery and had developed the classical symptoms of Reiter’s disease. Clinical improvement in the joints appeared in all cases in 7 days on a dosage of 150 mg. Phenergan daily, and all cases eventually returned to duty. Four of the patients had erythrocyte sedimentation rates varying from 46 to 97 mm. in one hour, and these all returned to normal at intervals varying from 21 days upwards. Broadly speaking, these cases had one aetiological factor in common, namely, a recent or present frank bacterial infection. This factor does not obtain in the aetiology of rheumatoid arthritis, but in view of the uniformly satisfactory results in these cases it was considered that the effect of Phenergan should be ascertained.

Method

Assessment of the results in the series recorded in this paper was confined to noting variations in the degree of pain, swelling, range of joint movement, and blood sedimentation rate at the beginning and end of the course of treatment. These limitations were imposed partly because the investigation was carried out in a small hospital where facilities for more elaborate records are not immediately to hand, partly because the assessment was regarded in the light of a pilot experiment which could be amplified if the results justified it, and mainly because variation in these four factors is the basic test of any treatment of arthritis of the rheumatoid type.

Material

Cases 1 to 9 had had rheumatoid arthritis for periods from 18 months upwards, and all were active during the period of the test, as will be noted from the blood sedimentation rate figures at the commencement of treatment. Joint conditions varied from soft tissue swelling to gross anatomical deformity, and all had some impairment of range of movement in at least one joint and pain in some degree. These cases were in-patients.

Cases 10 and 11 were out-patients living at a distance from the clinic, so that it was not practicable to record variations in signs and symptoms. Case 10 was, in point of fact, diagnosed later as gout, but Case 11 was undoubtedly suffering from rheumatoid arthritis. The common factor in both these latter cases was the presence of psoriasis.

Dosage

The results recorded in Levy’s series were obtained with a daily dosage of 150 mg. over a period of 7 days, but it was considered that in the rheumatoid series the duration should be at least 21 days and that larger amounts should be employed if possible. Treatment was therefore begun with 100 mg. daily to ascertain whether any patient had an idiosyncrasy, and the dosage was thereafter rapidly increased to 150 mg. daily and then to 200 mg. at which level it was maintained until the 21st day. The only exceptions to this schedule were Case 8 where nausea and general discomfort compelled us to stop treatment at the 14th day, and Case 9 where the maximum was 250 mg. daily, which was continued for the last 10 days of the investigation. The results are shown in the Table.

Discussion

It will be observed that, although there was some improvement in subjective symptoms, eight cases had either no objective change or an actual deterioration. The most striking feature was the blood sedimentation rate, which showed a significant alteration only in Case 4. This case had been on treatment with myocrisin and the blood sedimentation rate was already dropping before treatment with Phenergan was commenced. The relief of pain experienced in a number of cases had been anticipated, owing to the slight analgesic action of Phenergan. Apart from the symptoms already noted in Case 8, no other effects were seen except a certain amount of somnolence and
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TABLE
RESULTS OF TREATMENT WITH PHENERGAN IN ELEVEN PATIENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case No.</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (yrs)</th>
<th>Disease and Duration (yrs)</th>
<th>Effects of Phenergan Therapy</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pain</td>
<td>Swelling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 5</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 6</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 3</td>
<td>Diminished but still present</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 2</td>
<td>Some diminution</td>
<td>Half inch less in one knee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 5</td>
<td>Diminished</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 1½</td>
<td>Slight diminution</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 3</td>
<td>Some diminution</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis Many</td>
<td>No change</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis 9</td>
<td>Some diminution</td>
<td>No change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 (out-patient)</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Rheumatoid arthritis and psoriasis 5</td>
<td>Subjective improvement in skin and joints</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 (out-patient)</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Gout and psoriasis 3</td>
<td>Relieved</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

some interference with vision in one case. The results of this investigation are negative and would appear to suggest that in comparison with those of Levy the aetiological factor is not so specific. One might go even further and postulate that the arthritis of the rheumatoid type is not, in fact, an allergic response.

Summary

An investigation into the usefulness of Phenergan in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis is described. Eleven cases (ten rheumatoid) were treated. There was a uniform lack of objective response. The results are compared with those obtained in infective arthritis.

I am indebted to Dr. R. Forgan, of May and Baker Limited, for suggesting the investigation and supplying the Phenergan, and to Dr. Dick and Dr. MacDonald, Miss Grassich, Matron, and Mr. Brown, Physiotherapist, at the Nicolson MacKenzie Hospital, Strathpeffer, for their assistance in the investigation.

REFERENCE


Effet d’un anti-histaminique sur l’arthrite rhumatismale

RÉSUMÉ


Efecto de un antihistamínico sobre la artritis reumatoide

SUMARIO

Se describe una investigación sobre el valor de “Phenergan” en el tratamiento de la artritis reumatoide. Once casos (diez reumáticos) fueron tratados. Hubo ausencia uniforme de toda respuesta objetiva. Se comparan estos resultados con los obtenidos en la artritis infecciosa.
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