Serum immune globulins in Sjögren's syndrome

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Sjögren's syndrome, a disease principally affecting exocrine glands but with systemic manifestations, is characterized by hypergammaglobulinaemia and the presence of a wide variety of autoantibodies. These are of several types, both organ and non-organ specific, complement-fixing, and precipitating antibodies, and in general are found in a higher proportion of patients than, for instance, in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). Unlike SLE, however, circulating immune complexes with DNA are not found. As autoantibodies are immunoglobulins, it is surprising that no survey of immunoglobulin levels in Sjögren's syndrome is available other than in a few patients, although a considerable amount of similar information exists for rheumatoid arthritis and SLE.

As part of a study of patients with Sjögren's syndrome, levels of IgG, IgA, and IgM were determined.

Material and methods

Patients were considered to have Sjögren's syndrome if they had two or more features of the diagnostic triad: keratoconjunctivitis sicca; xerostomia and/or salivary gland enlargement; rheumatoid arthritis or another connective tissue disorder. None had sarcoidosis or malignant lymphoma. All had keratoconjunctivitis sicca, and because of this were attending a special clinic at Moorfields Eye Hospital, City Road, London.

For comparison, immunoglobulin levels were estimated in 23 patients with rheumatoid arthritis without sicca components attending a clinic at the Hammersmith Hospital, who had been selected to give a reasonable age and sex match, and to approximate to the duration of disease of the patients with Sjögren's syndrome with rheumatoid arthritis.

Serum immunoglobulin levels were determined by a modification of the Mancini Technique (Hobbs, 1970a). The standards used for calculation are the geometric means based on 107 adults (54 males; 53 females).

The geometric means and normal (± 2 S.D.) range in mg./100 ml. are as follows (see also Figure):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immunoglobulin</th>
<th>Geometric mean</th>
<th>Range (± 2 S.D.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>77 to 394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>64 to 349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>67 to 502</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Simultaneous elevation of all three immunoglobulins was found in seven patients, and of two immunoglobulins in a further sixteen (Table II). Serum electrophoresis did not show any monoclonal bands. One patient was found to have IgA

![Figure](https://example.com/figure.png) Distribution of serum levels of IgG, IgA, and IgM in fifty patients with Sjögren's syndrome. Normal ranges are shown hatched.

Results

Considerable elevation of serum levels of all three immunoglobulin classes was found in the fifty patients with Sjögren's syndrome, and the geometric means of IgG and IgM were elevated above the 95 per cent. level for the normal population (Table I). As the study group consisted of 44 females and six males, some allowance must be shown for the higher levels found in women, but the increase in levels is still marked.

Table 1 Immunoglobulin levels in fifty cases of Sjögren's syndrome (expressed as percentage of geometric mean of 107 normals)
of a normal level but with the dense precipitin ring
Hobbs (unpublished) finds in Waldenström's hyper-
globulinaemic purpura. This patient's IgG level
was 475 per cent. of standard, and IgM 202 per
cent. of standard. She in fact had hyperglobulinaemic
purpura together with the sicca syndrome and pul-
monary fibrosis, and on sternal marrow examination
increased numbers of plasma cells of normal mor-
phology were found. No Bence-Jones protein was
found (Gumpel, In press).

On considering the immunoglobulin levels in the
individual groups (Table III), i.e. in those with the
sicca syndrome alone, those with systemic sclerosis,
and those with rheumatoid arthritis—little difference
can be found between the group with sicca syndrome
alone and the group with rheumatoid arthritis. IgA
levels were slightly higher in the patients with
Sjögren's syndrome with rheumatoid arthritis than
in those with the sicca syndrome only. All three
immunoglobulin levels were more elevated in the
patients with Sjögren's syndrome than in those with
uncomplicated rheumatoid arthritis.

The four patients with systemic sclerosis sur-
prisingly had higher levels of IgG and IgM than the
other groups.

Little correlation was found between elevated
serum immunoglobulin levels and factors such as
duration of disease, age, presence or absence of
rheumatoid or antinuclear factors, except amongst
the patients with rheumatoid arthritis and sicca
features. Here, those with an elevated IgM level
tended to have a longer period of disease (19.2
v. 12.7 years) and a higher titre of rheumatoid
factor. Immunoglobulin levels were unlikely to have
been affected by treatment, as only a few patients
with Sjögren's syndrome and rheumatoid arthritis
had received gold or were on moderate doses of
steroids, and only two patients with the sicca
syndrome were taking moderate or minute doses of
steroids.

Discussion
The known predisposition of patients with Sjögren's
syndrome to immunological hyper-responsiveness

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**Table II Patterns of immunoglobulin elevation in individual patients**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immunoglobulin</th>
<th>Cases of Sjögren's syndrome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ + +</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None elevated</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* + elevated level

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**Table III Immunoglobulin levels in fifty cases of Sjögren's syndrome grouped according to other diseases, and compared with 23 patients with rheumatoid arthritis alone**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Sjögren's syndrome</th>
<th>Rheumatoid arthritis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sicca components only (23)</td>
<td>With progressive systemic sclerosis (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean age (yrs)</td>
<td>Female: Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>2:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Immunoglobulin</strong></td>
<td>Geometric mean</td>
<td>± 2 S.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G</strong></td>
<td>177</td>
<td>69 to 450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>A</strong></td>
<td>144</td>
<td>50 to 410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>M</strong></td>
<td>171</td>
<td>66 to 445</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
would make an increase in immunoglobulin levels predictable, especially of IgG. Considerable elevation of IgG levels in SLE has been previously reported (Cass, Mongan, Jacox, and Vaughan, 1968), with little elevation of IgA or IgM. Compared with SLE, Sjögren's syndrome is a chronic and relatively benign disease. In autoimmune diseases with initially raised IgG, Hobbs (1970b) has observed subsequent elevation of IgM.

Some authors (Claman and Merrill, 1966; Barden, Mullinax, and Waller, 1967; Marcolongo, Carcassi, Frullini, Bianco, and Bravi, 1967) have found that the principal immunoglobulin abnormality in rheumatoid arthritis is an elevation of IgA. This was not confirmed by other workers (Veys and Claessens, 1968) nor was it reflected in the matched patients with uncomplicated rheumatoid arthritis in this study, although it has been found in random patients with rheumatoid arthritis at this hospital. The findings regarding IgG and IgM elevation have been variable. In this study there was a marked similarity of the elevated immunoglobulin levels in the patients with the sicca syndrome only and in those with Sjögren's syndrome with rheumatoid arthritis, although more frequent elevation of IgM was found in the latter, especially in comparison to the patients with uncomplicated rheumatoid arthritis. Bloch, Buchanan, Wohl, and Bunim (1965), who studied 62 patients with Sjögren's syndrome, had found more marked hypergammaglobulinaemia in cases of the sicca syndrome than in those with rheumatoid arthritis. In our four patients with systemic sclerosis, there was a very marked elevation of IgG and IgM, which was surprising, as immunoglobulins are not commonly elevated in systemic sclerosis. The four patients were also unusual in that three had telangiectasia, Raynaud’s phenomenon, and acrosclerosis as their predominant lesion, and one had facial hemiatrophy and coup de sabre (Gumpel, Wright, and Holborow).

Heremans (1960) estimated immunoglobulin levels in four patients with Sjögren’s syndrome, but in three of them diseases such as chronic active hepatitis were also present, and in the one relatively uncomplicated case the IgA and IgM levels were normal, but the IgG was not available. Some information on the immunoglobulin levels of the group of patients with Sjögren’s syndrome studied at the National Institutes of Health can be gathered from the levels given for certain patients (Talal, Sokoloff, and Barth 1967; Talal, Zisman, and Schur, 1968; Talal, Asofsky, and Lightbody, 1970), and if one excludes the patients with reticulum cell sarcoma pseudolymphoma, and macroglobulinaemia, a general but moderate increase in IgG is found, with relatively normal levels of IgA and IgM.

Summary

Marked elevation of IgG and IgM levels were found in fifty patients with Sjögren’s syndrome, and a lesser increase in IgA levels. There was little difference between patients with sicca components alone and those with rheumatoid arthritis, but in a smaller group with systemic sclerosis levels of all three immunoglobulins were very elevated. By comparison immunoglobulin levels were only modestly raised in patients with uncomplicated rheumatoid arthritis.

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References


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