Clinical meeting

The following papers were presented at the Annual General Meeting on November 23 and 24, 1973.


Penicillamine has been shown to be effective treatment for Rheumatoid Arthritis (Multicentre Trial Group, 1973). In this study, the effectiveness and toxicity of penicillamine and gold are compared.

Eighty-six patients at 3 centres were given either gold or penicillamine according to a randomized schedule, stratified for age, sex, and therapy with steroids and other drugs. Dosage regimens were as follows: gold, 10, 20, 30, and 40 mg weekly for the first 4 weeks, then 50 mg weekly for 18 weeks, then 50 mg monthly; penicillamine base 250 mg daily (or 300 mg daily of hydrochloride) for 2 weeks, increasing by 250 mg or equivalent fortnightly, the maximum dose being determined by the response, but in most cases being 1 to 1-8 g daily. Anti-inflammatory and analgesic drugs were standardized before the beginning of the trial and kept constant as far as possible. The patients were treated by a physician at their own centre; assessments were made by a ‘blind’ observer from another centre. All assessments reported were made by 2 observers, the same observer measuring the same patients on all occasions. The following measurements were made after 3 and 6 months of treatment: pain (visual analogue and descriptive rating scales), an assessment of progress, duration of morning stiffness, grip strength, articular index, and proximal interphalangeal joint size. Nodules were counted. Side effects were recorded by the physician treating the patients, who were asked not to mention them to the observer. ESR, Latex test, and SCAT were measured at 3-monthly intervals and x-rays taken 6 monthly.

Improvement in clinical measurements and ESR were seen in most patients and the effects of gold and penicillamine were comparable. There was a reduction in the titres of tests for rheumatoid factor but this bore no relation to changes in the disease. In the first few months of treatment, gold was discontinued more often than penicillamine, reflecting the high incidence of rashes.

Penicillamine is a useful alternative to gold therapy in patients with active rheumatoid arthritis.

Trial of Azathioprine, Cyclophosphamide, and Gold in Rheumatoid Arthritis. By J. Woodland, R. M. Mason, J. Harris, A. St. J. Dixon, H. L. F. Currey, A. M. Brownjohn, J. Davies, and B. D. Owen-Smith (The London Hospital and Royal Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases, Bath)

A double blind, between patient, two-centre trial of azathioprine (A), cyclophosphamide (C), and gold (G) was presented. Patients were selected for the trial on the following criteria—they had seropositive (latex 1/80), erosive, definite rheumatoid arthritis which had reached a stage when a clinical decision to prescribe gold therapy would normally have been taken. 121 patients satisfied these criteria and were admitted to the trial.

All received apparently identical tablets and injections, one of which contained the active substance. Patients were randomly allocated to A (2.5 mg/kg/day), C (1.5 mg/kg/day), or G (standard regimen of 50 mg injections). 62 patients completed 48 weeks, and 36 patients completed 72 weeks.

Clinical results

Joint score, joint number grip strength, functional capacity, early morning stiffness, and subjective grading were recorded. The three treatment groups were comparable at entry into the trial, and all showed a general trend of improvement. However, the Mann Whitney U test revealed some significant differences between treatments in certain criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>A vs. G</th>
<th>C vs. G</th>
<th>C vs. A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Functional capacity at 6 mths</td>
<td>A &gt; G, P &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>C &gt; G, P &lt; 0.01</td>
<td>C &gt; A, P &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint score at 18 mths</td>
<td>C &gt; A, P &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>C &gt; G, P &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>C &gt; A, P &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint number at 18 mths</td>
<td>C &gt; A, P &lt; 0.05</td>
<td>C &gt; G, P &lt; 0.002</td>
<td>C &gt; A, P &lt; 0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Proceedings: Penicillamine or gold for rheumatoid arthritis? Multicentre trial using 'blind' observers. The first six months.
E C Huskisson, T J Gibson, H W Balme, H Berry, H C Burry, R Grahame, F D Hart, D R Henderson and J A Wojtulewski

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doi: 10.1136/ard.33.4.399-a

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