References


Rheumatoid arthritis and type 1 diabetes mellitus

Sir, I read with interest the letter from Dr Rudge.1 We had reported a study2 in which we demonstrated an increased prevalence of type 1 diabetes and autoimmune thyroid disease in close relatives of patients with classical or definite rheumatoid arthritis. The rheumatoid patients demonstrated an increased prevalence of organ specific autoantibodies when compared to a control group with degenerative joint disease. We also included several pedigrees demonstrating the close relationship between rheumatoid arthritis and type 1 diabetes within some families. Dr Rudge's study was carried out at Nottingham along similar lines, but her study did not confirm our findings. It was mentioned by her that both the hospitals in which our study was carried out have an interest in the immunogenetics of these diseases and that this could attract the sort of cases we were interested in. In fact both rheumatology clinics service busy districts and there were very few referrals from outside our catchment areas. I suspect that this alone is not enough to explain the discrepancy.

Our original hypothesis was that the increased prevalence of type 1 diabetes in close relatives of rheumatoid patients could be predicted from the association both these diseases have with HLA DR4. We mentioned in the concluding paragraph of our paper that we would like to study HLA genotypes in families where one sibling had rheumatoid arthritis and another sibling had type 1 diabetes or other autoimmune endocrine disease. Since our paper was published we have studied some of the original families reported and others not included in the study; we have also studied some patients with coexistent type 1 diabetes and rheumatoid arthritis. Although this work is at a preliminary stage there is no clear association between these two diseases and HLA DR4 in the families and individual patients studied.

The pedigrees of families with coexistent rheumatoid arthritis and type 1 diabetes suggest a relationship between these two diseases, and we are confident that a mechanism for the common genetic susceptibility will be identified.

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References

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