New issues in tuberculosis

We read with interest the recent article by Kaufmann, who reported new issues in the epidemiology and treatment of tuberculosis. Dr Kaufmann pointed out that tuberculosis remains a significant health threat in the new European Union member states, in contrast with the "old" EU member states, in which the incidence of this disease is decreasing. Accordingly, he reported the incidence for Slovenia as above 20/100 000.

It is important to clarify that the mentioned incidence was last reported in Slovenia in 1999. Since 1995 tuberculosis in Slovenia has been decreasing constantly, reaching an incidence of 17.5/100 000 in 2002. (Data also available on website http://www.eurotb.org, accessed 24 February 2005.) The preliminary data of the central registry for tuberculosis in Slovenia have shown a further decrease for 2003, with an incidence of 14.7/100 000 (personal report).

The importance of the omitted information is not only academic. Fictitious higher incidences of tuberculosis misrepresent the risk of this disease in Slovenian patients treated with biological drugs, which could be important in multicentre clinical studies.

Furthermore, we would like to mention that the incidence of tuberculosis in patients treated with biological agents in Slovenia is very low. This treatment is centrally indicated and evaluated. We have confirmed only one case of tuberculosis among 200 patients receiving biological agents (anakinra, infliximab, etanercept).

S Praprotnik, B Rozman, M Tomsic
Department of Rheumatology, University Medical Centre, Vodnikova, 62 Ljubljana, Slovenia
Correspondence to: Dr M Tomsic; matija.tomsic@guest.arnes.si

References


Author’s reply

I read with great interest the comments about the decreasing incidence of tuberculosis rates Slovenia. As is stated correctly, the incidence of tuberculosis in Slovenia is now below 20/100 000. Indeed, Fig 1 of our report shows the correct incidence rate and the text stating incidence “above 20/100 000” for Slovenia and Slovakia should read “above 15/100 000”. Data for 2002 provided by the most respected organisation, the World Health Organisation, were used for comparison of tuberculosis incidences in different EU member states.

I am pleased to witness a constant decrease in the number of tuberculosis in Slovenia (and other EU member states), which may have reached less than 15/100 000 in 2003.

S H E Kaufmann
Max Planck Institute for Infection Biology, Department of Immunology, Schumannstr 21/22, 10117 Berlin, Germany
Correspondence to: Dr S H E Kaufmann; kaufmann@mpiib-berlin.mpg.de

T Pincus
Vanderbilt Medical Center, 203 Oxford House, Nashville 37232, USA
Correspondence to: Professor T Pincus; tpincus@vanderbilt.edu

References


Authors’ reply

We agree with the comments of Professor Pincus, and appreciate his interest. His points expand upon and agree with our own, very nicely we believe, and we support his remarks.

S J Lee, A Kavanagh
University of California, San Diego, Division of Rheumatology, Allergy, and Immunology, La Jolla, CA, USA
Correspondence to: Dr A Kavanagh; akavanagh@ucsd.edu

Frozen shoulder

The study by Buchbinder et al. suffers from a major drawback to any study dealing with frozen shoulder when the pathophysiology
has passed the acute phase. In their study the mean duration of symptoms was 25.5 weeks in the active group with a standard deviation of 13.3 weeks, the mean therefore being approximately 6 months. This is high over the time course one would expect in the inflammatory phase of frozen shoulder, and therefore it is not surprising that prednisolone provided some benefit. I suspect the benefit provided was related to improvements in myalgia and wellbeing that occurred with the prescription of prednisolone, but which was quickly lost when prednisolone was reduced or stopped.

Although the authors quote a study co-authored by Buchbinder on a standardised protocol for the measurement of shoulder movement,1 we have concerns that the definition of frozen shoulder, as restricted passive movement by <30° in two or more planes measured at the onset of pain with a gravity inclinometer, may not be appropriate, given that frozen shoulder restricts all movements. There may also be other diseases present. In particular, it would be prudent to consider magnetic resonance imaging scans of the shoulder to confirm the degree, or not, of the adhesions within the shoulder capsule, and any other subtle changes which may not be clinically apparent, such as rotator cuff tears unidentified on ultrasound.

The study, therefore, provides no insight or treatment options for prednisolone in frozen shoulder, failing to recruit patients into the classical acute phase of a frozen shoulder within the first several months. Until such treatment is examined in an appropriate clinical trial, this study by Buchbinder provides no further evidence of the usefulness or otherwise of prednisolone in frozen shoulder. The study, not surprisingly, failed to show any long-lasting benefit of prednisolone because the shoulder, by its natural history, had entered the stiff phase.

G Champion
Suite 31, Ashford Specialist Centre, 57-59 Anzac Highway, Ashford 5035, Australia

Correspondence to: Dr G Champion; dr_gary_champion@bigpond.com

References

Authors’ reply
We thank Dr Champion for his interest and observations about our trial.

Our study clearly demonstrated a significant short term benefit of prednisolone in all outcomes measured at 3 weeks, including pain, disability, range of active motion, and participant rated improvement. Similarly, at 6 weeks the analysis still favoured the prednisolone group for most outcomes measured. Therefore Dr Champion’s concern that we may have missed an effect of prednisolone because we did not recruit participants early enough in the course of their illness is unfounded. Furthermore, all participants in the study had significant night pain at baseline (mean (SD) scores 7.5 (2.3) and 6.8 (2.1) in the prednisolone and placebo groups, respectively), generally indicative of acute symptoms and therefore likely to be responsive to steroids.

He highlights, though, an important concern for researchers who wish to study people in the early phase of a self limiting condition such as adhesive capsulitis when there may be delays in both seeking medical care and specialist advice. As outlined in our discussion, various strategies were used to recruit patients early in the course of the condition, including fast track referral.4 Previous trials of both prednisolone and intra-articular steroids have included participants with a similar duration of symptoms,5,6 suggesting that the difficulties of early recruitment are universal.

We agree with Dr Champion that patients with frozen shoulder typically exhibit global restriction of passive and active glenohumeral movements. Our inclusion criteria specifically included a requirement that there be restriction of passive motion of greater than 30° in two or more planes of movement. This was derived from a systematic review of previous inclusion criteria used in trials of adhesive capsulitis.7 In general, the diagnosis of adhesive capsulitis is easily made by clinical assessment.

Further research should be directed towards determining ways of prolonging its effect by either lengthening the duration of treatment and/or tapering the dose (without concomitant increasing the risk of toxicity), and/or considering combination or sequential treatment for adhesive capsulitis.

R Buchbinder
Department of Clinical Epidemiology, Cabrini Hospital and Monash University Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Melbourne, Australia

S Green
Australasian Cochrane Centre, Monash Institute of Health Services Research, Melbourne, Australia

S Hall
Department of Medicine Monash University, Institute of Rehabilitation Research, University of Melbourne, Rheumatologist, Cabrini Medical Centre, Melbourne, Australia

P Nash
Rheumatology Research Unit, Nambour, Queensland, Australia

A Forbes
Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine, Monash University, Melbourne, Australia

J L Hoving
Department of Clinical Epidemiology, Cabrini Hospital and Monash University Department of Epidemiology and Preventive Medicine

Correspondence to: Associate Professor R Buchbinder, Department of Clinical Epidemiology, Suite 41 Cabrini Medical Centre, 183 Wattletree Rd, Malvern, Victoria, Australia 3144; rachelle.buchbinder@med.monash.edu.au

References

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Further details can be obtained from: Miss Lisa McClair, ARC Epidemiology Unit, Stopford Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PT, UK. Tel: (0) 161 275 5993. Fax: (0) 161 275 5043. Email: Lisa.McClair@manchester.ac.uk

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