Correspondence

ANA in progressive systemic sclerosis

SIR, In their interesting abstract 'Antinuclear antibodies in progressive systemic sclerosis' Bernstein *et al.*¹ report the presence of anticentromere antibodies (ACA) in rather high percentages of patients with CREST syndrome and in 7% only of patients with diffuse scleroderma. These results are consistent with those published by other authors.^{2,3} We investigated for the presence of ACA (indirect immunofluorescence on Hep-2 cells) in sera of 91 patients with progressive systemic sclerosis (PSS). Our results are consistent with those obtained by Bernstein *et al.*¹ Nevertheless we would like to make some comments on the basis of the analysis conducted by subdividing up our 91 patients according to our classification (Fig. 1, Giordano⁴).

We found the highest ACA percentages in the patients (3/9 = 33.3%) without any skin involvement (i.e., sclerosis sine scleroderma or subgroup 1) and in the ones (5/14 = 35.7%) in whom sclerosis involved only fingers (i.e., sclerodactyly or subgroup 2). In PSS patients where hands and forearms and/or face and/or neck and/or legs and/or the upper thorax were involved (i.e., acrosclerosis stricto sensu or subgroup 3) ACA were infrequently found (4/42 = 9.5%). Furthermore ACA were never found in PSS patients where the skin of arms, thighs, and abdomen was involved too (i.e., intermediate syndrome or subgroup 4). Nevertheless ACA were found in 1 out of 3 patients affected with acute diffuse scleroderma (or subgroup 5).

We compared the PSS patients without any skin involvement or having fingers only involved (subgroups 1 and 2) with the patients presenting a relatively diffuse skin sclerosis (subgroup 3) or very diffuse sclerosis (subgroups 4 and 5). The incidence of ACA was found significantly greater in the subgroups 1 and 2, in which skin involvement is limited (Brandt and Snedecor test: $\chi^2 = 10.990$, $p < 0.01$). A life table study of survival⁵ demonstrated a better prognosis in the first 2 subgroups (i.e., subgroups 1 and 2) where ACA have been more often found. Therefore our results suggest that both ACA and a limited skin involvement could be related to a less poor prognosis. We did not find any relationship between ACA and any of the other phenomena of CREST syndrome (i.e., calcinosis, Raynaud, oesophagus involvement, telangiectasia). Therefore among the 5 phenomena of CREST syndrome only the extent of skin sclerosis is related to ACA and at the same time heralds a less poor prognosis.

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Fig. 1 Subgroups of PSS patients shown schematically on the basis of extent of skin sclerosis.

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Hypothyroidism and calcium pyrophosphate dihydrate deposition disease

SIR, There has been interest in the possible association between calcium pyrophosphate dihydrate deposition disease (CPPD) and hypothyroidism since the 1975 article by Dorwart and Schumacher.¹ Recently Alexander *et al.*² reported the occurrence of hypothyroidism in 10.5% in 105 patients with CPPD, an incidence higher than expected in an elderly population and higher than in their control groups (osteoarthritis patients and patients requiring acute medical admission). The authors suggested an association between 2 diseases.

Our experience has revealed no obvious association between hypothyroidism and CPPD. We reported the laboratory investigations in 36 CPPD patients and 29 control subjects and found no difference between the mean TSH values (the most sensitive laboratory measurement for hypothyroidism) and an equal incidence of elevated TSH results in the patients and controls.³ In a larger compilation McCarty reported no cases of hypothyroidism in 238 CPPD patients.⁴ The 6 of 12 patients reported by Dorwart and Schumacher with calcium pyrophosphate dihydrate crystals present in the synovial fluid were highly selected. All of the patients had florid myxoedema, many were referred to a rheumatologist, and 4 of the 6 patients with CPPD were elderly, ages 72 or older.

Hypothyroidism is frequently associated with musculoskeletal complaints,⁵ and these patients may be overrepresented in a rheumatology clinic. The prevalence of both hypothyroidism⁶ and CPPD increases with age, and in any study with older patients both diseases would be expected to be frequently encountered.

Before we accept hypothyroidism as an associated disease with CPPD we should await a study comparing the prevalence of CPPD in hypothyroid patients versus an age and sex-matched euthyroid control group.

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Age-related blood changes in hip osteoarthritis patients: a possible indicator of bone quality

SIR, Rapin and Lagier, in your correspondence columns,¹ report a significantly high mean serum albumin, calcium, and 25-hydroxycholecalciferol levels in patients with hip osteoarthritis compared with patients with femoral neck fractures and similar aged controls. These findings do not correspond with our experience.²⁻⁴ Our present data on calcium metabolism in women with primary osteoarthritis and primary osteoporosis are summarised in Table 1. The only difference between osteoporosis and osteoarthritis we could find was a higher calciuria, and a higher calcium/creatinine ratio in a morning spot urine while fasting, in patients with osteoporosis. The latter findings point to a more negative bone balance due to increased bone resorption in osteoporosis.

The discordance between our findings and those of Rapin and Lagier can be explained by several factors. Firstly, our patients were all women; the osteoarthritis patients all had Heberden nodes plus arthrosis at other joints, mostly on hips or knees; and the osteoporosis patients all suffered from at least one vertebral collapse, which is a failure of trabecular bone. The sex of the patients of Rapin and Lagier is not mentioned. The Osteoarthritis cases were a mixed group of patients with coxarthrosis, which can be the result of different diseases (primary or secondary osteoarthritis), and the osteoporosis cases had femoral neck fracture, which results from failure of cortical bone. Secondly, the difference in serum calcium levels in the study of Rapin and Lagier is due to a higher serum albumin level in the osteoarthritis group. In our study there was no difference in serum total protein, as there was no difference in serum calcium, phosphate, and alkaline phosphatase activity. Thirdly, 25-hydroxycholecalciferol is not the physiologically active vitamin D metabolite and is subject to seasonal variation⁵ and sunlight exposure. 1-25-dihydroxycholecalciferol on the other hand, which