Encore

Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) in older age groups
SLE is thought by some to present differently in older age groups. A meta-analysis suggests that some clinical manifestations such as Sjögren's syndrome and pulmonary disease are indeed more strongly associated with the onset in older people, whereas others such as alopecia, hypocomplementaemia, and neuropsychiatric illness are less commonly seen. The distinctions between the older and younger age groups, however, seem to be too blurred to be of much help. There may though be an association with HLA-DR3 in patients with older onset disease.
Arthritis Rheum 1989; 32: 1226-32.

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and racial differences
There seems to be a less obvious association in North American black subjects between HLA-DR4 and rheumatoid arthritis than with white subjects, and it has been postulated that perhaps RA behaves differently in the black population as SLE clearly seems to do. This report from Alabama could find no such difference, either clinically or radiologically.
J Rheumatol 1989; 16: 1197-200.

Chondrocalcinosis, knee osteoarthritis, and Framingham
We tend to associate the name of Framingham with research into coronary artery disease, but useful epidemiological research into arthritis is done there too as this observer learnt with interest when visiting the department a few years ago. The Framingham Knee Osteoarthritis Study has shown that there is a modest association between radiological osteoarthritis and chondrocalcinosis, and a similar association between the latter and severe radiological changes of arthritis. It is concluded that there is indeed a significant link between osteoarthritis and chondrocalcinosis, but that they both increase in prevalence independently with age, as others have shown before.
J Rheumatol 1989; 16: 1241-5.

Polymyositis and HTLV-1 infection
Polymyositis is a disease of unknown cause, though viral and autoimmune factors have been implicated. A study from Jamaica found IgG antibodies to human T cell lymphotropic virus (HTLV-1) in 11 of 13 patients where it was looked for. We should perhaps now consider this virus as an important trigger for this disease where the virus is endemic: presumably it acts by triggering an autoimmune response with, it is suggested, cross reaction to other antigens in muscle.
Lancet 1989; ii: 1184-7.

Hip fusion: the case of the contralateral joint
Patients often point out that when one hip joint is fused they are worried that they may be putting an unfair load onto the joints of the other limb. A study from Cornell University has shown that where one hip has been fused previously a total arthroplasty of the hip of the opposite leg is followed by increased mechanical failure and loosening of that arthroplasty compared with the expected rate of complications. Furthermore, if a total arthroplasty of the knee of the same limb as the fused hip is done it is usually stiff and with a limited range of movement requiring frequent manipulation to free it.
J Bone Joint Surg [Am] 1989; 71: 1355-62.

Interferon alfa treatment and cutaneous lupus erythematosus
A patient had severe and uncontrollable cutaneous lupus

erythematosus: the disease did not respond to steroids, dapsone, gold salts, or isotretinoid, and antimalarial and thalidomide treatment caused a mild neuropathy and retinopathy and had to be stopped. It did, however, respond to interferon alfa treatment given over three months. The patient's antinuclear antibody titre rose from 1 in 64 to 1 in 4096 during the treatment though. Nevertheless, she developed no signs of systemic disease and the titres decreased after treatment was stopped and she improved.
N Engl J Med 1989; 321: 1550-1.

Peripheral spondyloarthropathy after 50 years of age
Observers from Clermont-Ferrand in France describe a late onset form of B27 related peripheral spondyloarthropathy in men aged over 50 years. It is characterised by a mild oligoarthritis of the legs, minimal disease of the axial skeleton, and fibrosis of the synovium with few cells in the synovial fluid and no bony erosions. These patients seem to be very ill and the disease persists for many years in some. About half subsequently develop ankylosing spondylitis and the response to non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs is poor. Perhaps its late onset is the reason for its different presentation from classical ankylosing spondylitis.
J Rheumatol 1989; 16: 1214-7.

Titanium alloy and total hip arthroplasty wear
The search for the perfect alloy for total joint arthroplasty goes on, but alas it has not yet been found. Titanium has recently been in favour because of its admirable qualities, but a report now published suggests that it is more susceptible to wear by acrylic cement particles and the polyethylene component seems to wear faster when used with titanium than when other metal alloys are used.
J Bone Joint Surg [Am] 1989; 71: 1337-42.

Global climatic change and our health
An article recently looks at the possible, indeed probable, effects on our health resulting from the greenhouse effect that we seem increasingly to be resigned to. To a mild degree we have been experiencing this already for the past 100 years. The results are hard to predict accurately, but among other expected calamities are mass refugee emigrations from arid areas, reduction in land fertility by rising salinity of the water table, more rain, increased flooding, increased water contamination, increased ultraviolet light, reduction in plankton in the seas, increased heat stress, and disease. The list seems endless. A gleam of hope is that man is very adaptable even if he seems intent on polluting himself: other forms of life upon whom we depend may be much less adaptable, however.
N Engl J Med 1989; 321: 1577-83.

Aspirin and early pregnancy
From time to time rheumatologists are faced with the problem of a young woman with rheumatoid arthritis under control who now wishes to become pregnant. The dilemma is always that, on the one hand, it is desirable to reduce to an absolute minimum the drugs that she takes so as to decrease the potential risks to the fetus, while, on the other, there is always the fear of losing control of the arthritis. Any information about likely effects or otherwise of drugs on the baby is welcome. It is a relief to know that aspirin at any rate does not seem to increase the risk of congenital heart defects when taken in the first trimester.
N Engl J Med 1989; 321: 1639-47.

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