Conclusion Retinal vascular disease may be frequent in patients with RA. The presence of aPL may be associated with a higher prevalence of retinal abnormalities in RA patients.

THU0145 HYPERHOMOCYSTEINEMIA IN RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

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Background Recent reports have suggested that elevated total circulating homocysteine levels are important risk factor for vascular diseases, stroke, and thrombotic events in patients with atherosclerosis and in patients with systemic lupus erythematosus.

Objectives The aim of our study was to analyse the relationship between plasma homocysteine levels and thrombotic events in a select population of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients with or without antiphospholipid antibody (aPL) positivity.

Methods 168 female RA patients attending the Extra-articular Involvement RA Clinic of University of Genova and 72 female subjects matched for age and vascular diseases as controls were included in the study. 30 of the RA patients showed aPL antibody positivity and 138 were found aPL antibody negativity on the basis of the concomitant presence or absence of high concentrations of anticardiolipin (aCL) antibodies or presence of Lupus Anticoagulant (LA). All subjects were evaluated for plasma homocysteine concentrations and for the occurrence of thrombotic events.

Results Twenty-five RA patients and five controls reported a history of thrombotic events. Eleven and nine of RA patients with aPL antibody positivity were found previously affected by venous and arterial thrombosis, respectively. Plasma levels of homocysteine in aPL antibody positive patients with thrombosis were found significantly higher than in aPL antibody positive RA patients without thrombosis ($p < 0.001$). When RA patients with thrombosis were analysed a significant increase of plasma homocysteine levels was found in aPL antibody positive RA patients versus aPL antibody negative RA patients ($p < 0.04$) and versus related controls ($p < 0.003$).

Conclusion The association observed between aPL antibody positivity and high levels of plasma homocysteine in RA patients may represent a possible risk factor for thrombotic events. Therefore, it is suggested that hyperhomocysteinemia might be involved in vascular-related mortality observed in RA patients with a history of thrombosis.

THU0146 REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE WITH INFlixIMAB IN THE TREATMENT OF RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS: A SUBGROUP ANALYSIS OF METHOTREXATE RECEIVING AND NON-RECEIVING PATIENTS

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Background Infliximab is a chimeric monoclonal anti-TNF antibody developed to treat rheumatoid arthritis (RA) patients who have had a less than optimal response to previous therapy. It has been recommended that infliximab be given concomitantly with

methotrexate (MTX) to prevent the development of autoantibodies.

Objectives To identify clinical response and adverse events in RA patients treated with infliximab for a period of 6 months, with a subgroup analysis of MTX-receiving (MTX-R) and non-receiving (MTX-NR) patients.

Methods RA patients receiving infliximab at our ambulatory infusion unit completed questionnaires regarding RA history, treatment, and measures of disease activity (HAQ) at baseline, and at 2 weeks, 8 weeks, and every 2 months thereafter. Patients were queried about side effects experienced between infusions. ANOVA statistics were used for comparison.

Results 36 patients were started on infliximab between January–July 2000 (F/M: 33/3, mean age: 63 ± 12.9 y, mean disease duration: 15.3 ± 10.2 y) and 24 patients completed 6 months of treatment. Patients had failed an average of 3 DMARDs prior to infliximab. HAQ scores for 24/36 patients who completed 6 months of treatment significantly improved from 1.95 ± 0.60 to 1.21 ± 0.67 ($p = 0.0002$). In subgroup analysis, the baseline characteristics of MTX-R and MTX-NR groups were similar with respect to age and disease duration. Twenty (56%) patients were not receiving MTX due to history of adverse event, allergic reaction or patient refusal. For patients who completed 6 months of infliximab: in MTX-R group, HAQ scores for 14/24 patients improved from 1.99 ± 0.58 to 1.34 ± 0.54 ($p = 0.005$); and in MTX-NR group HAQ scores for 10/24 patients improved from 1.89 ± 0.65 to 1.05 ± 0.81 ($p = 0.02$). During 6 months of follow-up, 3/10 (30%) of MTX-NR and 9/14 (64%) of MTX-R patients had a total of 23 adverse events after 198 infusions. There was no difference between the 2 subgroups with respect to the type of adverse events. Ten MTX-NR patients discontinued treatment before 6 months (adverse events: 7, inadequate response to treatment: 2, and non-compliance: 1. Only 2 MTX-R patients discontinued treatment prior to 6 months, due to inadequate response.

Conclusion Following 6 months of infliximab treatment, RA patients with long-standing disease demonstrate a clinically important and statistically significant improvement in functional disability as measured by HAQ. However, our subgroup analysis suggests that infliximab administered without MTX carries a higher rate of discontinuation. These findings may be due to patient characteristics or our small sample size. Continuing follow-up of patients receiving infliximab in the absence of MTX will provide a better understanding of the true risk/benefit of infliximab used alone.

THU0147 TRACKING RA EROSIONS OVER THE FIRST 2 YEARS OF DISEASE: AN MR AND XR STUDY

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Background MRI is a highly sensitive technique for revealing rheumatoid erosions. Studies from this cohort have revealed MR wrist erosions in 45% and XR erosions in 12% of early RA patients.¹ It has been proposed that MR erosions progress to XR erosions during the course of RA but lesion-based evidence for this is scarce. We have used MR and XR data from this cohort to examine the predictive value of a baseline MR score and to track the fate of individual lesions over a 2 year period.

Objectives

Methods An inception cohort of 42 early RA patients have been studied since symptom-onset. Clinical, MR (1.5 Tesla GE Signa Horizon scanner) and XR data were obtained at baseline and 1 year. MR scans of the dominant wrist and XRs of the same region were read independently by 2 radiologists and scored for erosions at 15 sites within the carpus. Further 2 year clinical and XR data was used to determine the ability of the baseline MRI score to predict XR erosions at 2 years. A lesion-based analysis was also performed to track individual lesions from MR at 0 and 1 year time-points to XR at 1 and 2 years.

Results The baseline MR erosion score was predictive of XR erosion score at 2 years ($p = 0.008$).

Patients with a total MR score (erosions, bone oedema, synovitis and tendonitis) ≥ 13 at baseline were significantly more likely to develop erosions on XR at 2 years (OR 13.4, 95% CI [2.65, 60.5], $p = 0.002$). Baseline wrist MRI has a sensitivity of 80%, a specificity of 76%, a positive predictive value (ppv) of 67% and a high negative predictive value (npv) of 86% for the prediction of wrist XR erosions at 2 years. A lesion-centred analysis, revealed that 84% of baseline MR erosions were still present at one year, increasing to 100% if complete concordance between radiologists was required. The number of MR erosion sites per patient increased from 2.1 (SD 2.7) to 5.0 (SD 4.6) ($p < 0.0001$) over the 1st year of disease. When MR erosion sites were tracked, 21% and 26% were observed on XR, 1 and 2 years later. A high baseline Ritchie score and ESR were predictive of progression of MR to XR erosions over 1 year ($p = 0.01$ and 0.03) but there was no association with the shared epitope. Progression of MR to XR erosions was not seen in those with transient polyarthritis.

Conclusion MRI scans of the wrist taken at first presentation of RA can be useful in predicting radiographic erosions. Thus, MRI may have a role in selection of patients for more or less aggressive management. Most MR lesions persist over the first year of disease but only 1 in 4 progress to XR erosions at the same sites, 1 year later. This may relate to healing, observer error or technical limitations of radiography at the wrist. Progression of MR to XR erosions is greatest in those with high baseline disease activity.

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THU0148 DEMOGRAPHIC AND CLINICAL CHARACTERISTICS IN LONGSTANDING RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS: A THREE COUNTRY COMPARISON

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Background

Objectives The purpose of this cross-sectional study is to compare the demographic and clinical characteristics of postmenopausal women with longstanding rheumatoid arthritis (RA) between general rheumatology clinics in three European countries.

Methods A total of 150 female patients with RA (50 per centre), aged between 50 and 70 years and a disease duration of 5 or

more years attending a general rheumatology clinic, were consecutively included as part of the OSTRAL study. Demographic and clinical data were collected according to standardised procedures. Hand X-rays (Larsen) were read by one observer. Mean $\pm$ SD are presented in case of normal distribution; median (range) in skewed data. Groups were compared by means of ANOVA. Kruskal-Wallis or Chi square test were performed when appropriate.

Results Mean age (61 ± 6 years), disease duration (14(5–53) years), and rheumatoid factor status (63% positive) were similar in the three centres. BMI (kg/m^2) values 23.0 ± 2.9 in Oslo, 25.7 ± 3.8 in Amsterdam and 27.7 ± 6.0 in Truro respectively, differed between the 3 centres ($p = 0.000^{ab}$). Visual analogue scale (VAS) for pain (MM) differed between the 3 countries ($p = 0.02^c$).

Post hoc test difference ^aOslo-Truro, ^bOslo-Amsterdam, ^cTruro-Amsterdam.

Abstract THU0148 Table 1

	Oslo	Amsterdam	Truro	p-value
Deform.joint (max.18)	4(0–15)	5(0–16)	8(0–18)	0.003 ^{ac}
HAQ (0–3)	1.3 $\pm$ 0.6	1.3 $\pm$ 0.7	1.9 $\pm$ 0.7	0.000 ^{ac}
tot. Larsen (0–120)	25(0–117)	47(2–105)	34(0–102)	0.004 ^{bc}
Prednisone use (%)	61	28	26	0.000 ^{ab}

Prednisone use refers to current use of the drug.

Conclusion These comparisons may reflect different lifestyle and treatment strategies in the different countries with consequent different outcome.

THU0149 TEMPORO-MANDIBULAR DAMAGE IN PSORIATIC ARTHRITIS

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Background Psoriatic arthritis (PA) is a chronic progressing spinal and articular disease associated with psoriasis resulting in development of erosive arthritis, ankylosing of joints and intra-articular osteolysis. It is included into seronegative arthritides and has clinical-radiological peculiarities common for this group of diseases.

Objectives To find out the prevalence and character of temporo-mandibular damage (TMD) during PA and determine the correlation of such damage with other manifestations of this disease.

Methods 76 PA pts were examined. Median age of pts was 36.7 ± 5.6 years and median disease duration 3.4 ± 0.8 years. Radiological stage of damage (except TMD) in 42.1% of pts was II according Steinbrocker and in 39.5% – III. All pts had clinical examination of TMD with detailing of volume of mobility, possible dislocation of articular disk, determining of mandibular deviation during mouth opening, cephalometric studies. TMD radiography by method of Schuller and Parma, orthopantomography, stratal magnetic-resonance computer tomography.

Results TMD in PA debut was found in 25 (32.9%) of pts and occupied the 6th place by frequency among other articular damages. In 60% of cases arthralgia was noticed. In some cases there were stable arthralgias and speedy decrease of articular mobility of this localization. More often we found bilateral damage as