LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cowpox virus

Sir,—In 1889 Parinaud1 described a unilateral conjunctivitis acquired by close contact with infected animals. It was a granular conjunctivitis accompanied by swollen eyelids and a mucopurulent secretion. The parotid region was swollen and inflamed. The granulation tissue persisted for months and histologically there were epithelial and mast cells present. A variety of agents have been implicated—for example, cat-scratch disease, tularaemia, tuberculosis, blastomycosis, coccidioidomycosis, syphilis, and actinomycosis, etc.2

We report a necrotic granulomatous conjunctivitis caused by the cowpox virus, a virus closely related but not identical to vaccinia.3 There is no recorded case of cowpox conjunctivitis occurring in the United Kingdom.

A 15-year-old boy who lived on a farm was referred with 1 week's history of swollen sore left upper and lower eyelids with inflamed conjunctiva. Initially he noticed slight erythema on the left lower lid. One day later the conjunctiva had become inflamed and both lids swollen and the GP noticed a small red spot on the lower lid and tiny blisters on the conjunctiva. The lid swelling had increased until after 7 days he could not open the eye and the left side of his face became swollen (Fig 1). There was no history of trauma to the eye and the condition had not responded to systemic antibiotics.

And the fornices were totally free of adhesions. The bulbar conjunctiva was approximately 7 mm thick and there was a 5 mm cuff of perilimbal necrotic conjunctiva. This was excised and an area of thickened conjunctiva was sent for histology. The cornea, the fundi, and the media were normal. Swabs were taken for viral tissue culture and smear for inclusion bodies.

A diagnosis was made of acute fulminating necrotic conjunctivitis due to herpes simplex.

Two days later he developed indurated areas of bulbar conjunctiva palpated through the upper and lower lids.

The patient left hospital before further histological examination. The histological report confirmed a severe conjunctival infection with areas of necrosis and epitheloid and round cell infiltration. The indurated areas were considered to be granulation tissue with a marked fibrotic response. The tissue culture grew a cowpox virus. The carrier of cowpox virus is thought to be a domestic cat.

Three months later the visual acuity was 6/6 in each eye and the bulbar conjunctiva under the superior and inferior eyelids remained swollen, red and indurated, but not tender.

There was a 7 mm area of symblepharon affecting the lower lid and a 5 mm polypoid exocrescence of bulbar conjunctiva in the superior temporal quadrant.

Figure 1 Appearance of patient 7 days after onset of conjunctivitis.

Using Desmarre's retractors a very chemosed conjunctiva with mucopurulent discharge on the surface was exposed. The cornea was completely covered by a chemosed conjunctiva. A provisional diagnosis of purulent conjunctivitis with preseptal cellulitis was considered. The following day the patient was examined under general anaesthesia. Despite appearances both upper and lower lids were of normal thickness and the fornices were totally free of adhesions. The bulbar conjunctiva was approximately 7 mm thick and there was a 5 mm cuff of perilimbal necrotic conjunctiva. This was excised and an area of thickened conjunctiva was sent for histology. The cornea, the fundi, and the media were normal. Swabs were taken for viral tissue culture and smear for inclusion bodies.

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W N DIGMORE Z M DABIR
Department of Ophthalmology,
District General Hospital,
Burnley

1 Parinaud H. Infective conjunctivitis of animal origin. Ar d' Oc Sic 1889; 252.

Segmentation of fluorescence in the retinal microcirculation— is it a valid indicator of blood cell flow?

Sir,—We read with interest the article of Arend et al on the use of scanning laser ophthalmoscopy for retinal capillary blood flow studies.1 Perifoveal capillary blood cell velocities were found to be retarded in diabetic patients compared with normal subjects. The basic assumption for the blood flow measurements was that the segmentation in the fluorescence intensity corresponded to segments of erythrocytes in the form of rouleaux formation (low fluorescence) and cell-free plasma (high fluorescence).

Figure 2 The same retinal location as in Figure 1 illuminated with white light to show the red blood cells. The density of the blood cells in the capillaries does not necessarily correlate with the alterations in the fluorescence intensity.

Using our vascular trichrome method2 we noticed that segmentation in the fluorescence intensity does not necessarily correspond to the erythrocytes versus plasma assumption. Figure 1 shows a retinal capillary (rat) with alterations of the fluorescence intensity along the vessel. In Figure 2 the same vessel is illuminated with white light, demonstrating that erythrocytes are seen throughout both high and low fluorescence areas. We might have regarded these findings as post mortem artefacts were they not supported by other experimental data. We recently developed a new method, named fluorescent blood cell angiography, for in vivo dynamic observation of fluorescent labelled erythrocytes in the retinal capillary net.3 By changing the filter setting of the imaging system a conventional fluorescent angiography of the same capillary net can also be performed. These observations were recorded on a video tape for later analysis. Using this new method we found that the fluorescence segmentation velocity in the capillary net does not necessarily correspond to the blood cell velocity. While in some capillary pathways the labelled blood cell velocity did correspond to the segmentation velocity, in other capillary pathways in the same retina these velocities did not correspond. Moreover, factors such as systemic blood pressure, hyperglycaemia, intraocular pressure, and capillary architecture seem to have an unpredictable effect on the ratio between blood cell flow and the phenomenon of fluorescent segmentation. In summary, we think that the scanning laser ophthalmoscope is a promising tool in future analysis of capillary blood flow. Nonetheless, capillary fluorescence segmentation has to be better understood if this phenomenon is to be used for quantitative retinal capillary blood cell flow measurements.

JOSHUA BEN-NUN
IAN J CONSTABLE
The Lions Eye Institute and Department of Surgery,
The University of Western Australia,
Nedlands, Australia


Reply

Sir,—Biomicroscopic recordings of conjunctival (Fig 1) and periangular capillaries4 clearly show segmentation corresponding to erythrocytes versus plasma. From these findings and our experience in conjunctival video
angiographic observations we conclude segment-
ment in the fluorescence intensity corres-
ponds to segments of erythrocytes and cell-free
plasma. The figures of Ben-nun and Constable
do not necessarily confirm our assumption.
The segmentation of fluorescence intensity
seems to correspond to packed cells. The
interpretation of the postmortem findings
could be clarified if the illumination was
changed from white to green light. With green
light illumination the contrast between red
blood cells and plasma is best, owing to the
maximum of absorption of haemoglobin.

The fluorescent blood cell angiography men-
tioned is very interesting. Those findings may
clarify the interpretation of our report.
Recently Tanaka et al. observed fluorescent
dots in perifoveal capillaries. They proposed
that these dots correspond to leucocytes and
platelets in the circulating blood. We do not
agree with their conclusion. They are using the
automatic gain control in the set-up of the
scanning laser ophthalmoscope which leads to
decreased signal-to-noise ratio.

In conclusion, we think that our interpreta-
tion of the observed phenomenon (Fig 2) seems
to be acceptable. In addition until now our
method is the only one that measures flow
velocities and morphological parameters in the
perifoveal capillaries objectively.

Figure 1 Conjunctival capillary vessels
(magnification ×100) showing the segmentation
plasma versus corneoscleral formation.

Figure 2 Perifoveal capillary network with
hyperfluorescent gap (arrow) in macular capillary
(modified from Wolf et al.).

Periorbital necrobiosis lipoidica

Str.,—I read with interest the case reported
by Mr Lavy and colleagues. 1 An important
differential and possible alternative diagnosis to
that suggested which does not appear to have
been considered is that of necrobiosis xantho-
granuloma (NXG). This now well described
condition is a non-X histiocytic disease
characterised by intra-dermal xanthogranuloma
tissue lesional with perifoveal capillaries.

1 Jung F, Wappner M, Nüttgens HP, Kieselwetter H, Wolf S, Müller G. Zur Methodik der Video-
kuilarmikroskopie: bestimmung geometrischer
3 Tanaka T, Murakoshi K, Shimizu K. Fluorescence
fundi angiography with scanning laser ophthal-
moscope — visibility of leucocytes and platelets in
perifoveal capillaries. Ophthalmology 1991; 98:
824-9.
4 Wolf S, Arend O, Tonnen H, Bertram B, Jung F, Reim M. Retinal capillary blood flow measure-
ments by means of scanning laser ophthalmo-
98: 996-1000.

In 1989 the first international meeting devoted
to thyroid eye disease was held in Montreal.
In addition to endocrinologists and ophthalmo-
ologists there were immunologists, patholo-
gists, radiotherapists, otolaryngologists and ocul-
plastic surgeons, geneticists, biochemists, and
statisticians.

Despite such an array of expertise the first 78
pages, which are devoted to trying to expound
the pathological processes, are far from conclu-
sive. Autoantibodies to eye muscle can be
demonstrated, but they show incomplete
specificity, with some cross reactivity with
diaphragm muscle and with thyroid antigens.
Connective tissue antibodies and cell mediated
immunity are also considered. Wall proposes a
working hypothesis that Graves' ophthal-
mopathy follows the reaction of a primarily
thyroid-directed cytotoxic antibody with an
antigen present on the surface of the eye muscle
membrane. Studies of T-lymphocyte reactivity
to retrobulbar antigens is emerging as one of
the key areas. However, the very protracted
natural history of the condition and the pro-
blem of unilaterality of the propothesis in most
patients are questions that will have to be
answered by any proposed pathogenic
mechanism.

The remaining 109 pages cover the problems
of clinical management. Unfortunately there is
still no universally agreed scheme to describe
the various forms and levels of involvement
of the eye and orbit in this condition. There is
a useful chapter on the structure and mode of
action of cyclosporin, but another chapter is
given over to plasmapheresis, though most
workers have abandoned this as a mode of
treatment.

The long term follow-up of patients treated
by orbital radiotherapy at Stanford under the
direction of the late J P Kirsch confirms the value
of 2000 cGy of megavoltage irradiation in
fractionated doses over a two-week period.
Recent results from (West) Germany claim

Reply

Str.,—I note with interest Mr Lavy's suggestion
that a diagnosis of necrobiosis xanthogranu-
1 Lavy TE, Fink AM. Periorbital necrobiosis
2 Kossard S, Winkelmann RK. Necrobiosis xantho-
3 Rose GE, Patel BC, Garner A, Wright JE. Orbital
xanthogranulomas in adults. Br J Ophthalmo-
4 Luck J, Layton A, Noble BAN. Necrobiosis
xanthogranuloma with orbital involvement. J
5 Finn KC, Winkelmann RK. Xanthogranuloma
with paraproteinaemia. A review of 22 cases.

Graves' Ophthalmopathy: Current issues in
endocrinology and metabolism. Eds Jack R
Wall and Jacques How. Pp 196. £45.00.

The perifoveal capillaries are identified
by means of scanning laser ophthalmoscope
VH aN.

In conclusion, we think that our interpreta-
tion of the observed phenomenon (Fig 2) seems

1 Jung F, Körber N, Kieselwetter H, Prinze T, Wolf
S, Reim M. Measuring the microcirculation in
the human conjunctiva bulbi under normal and
hyperperfusion conditions. Graefes Arch Clin

JONATHAN LUCK
Department of Ophthalmology,
St James's University Hospital,
Leeds LS9 7TF

BOOK REVIEWS
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J Ben-Nun and I J Constable

doi: 10.1136/bjo.76.8.510-a

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