Pinealitis accompanying equine recurrent uveitis

Carolyn M Kalsow, Ann E Dwyer, Andrew W Smith, Thomas P Nifong

Abstract
There is no direct verification of pineal gland involvement in human uveitis. Specimens of pineal tissue are not available during active uveitis in human patients. Naturally occurring uveitis in horses gives us an opportunity to examine tissues during active ocular inflammation. We examined the pineal gland of a horse that was killed because it had become blind during an episode of uveitis. The clinical history and histopathology of the eyes were consistent with post-leptospiral equine recurrent uveitis. The pineal gland of this horse had significant inflammatory infiltration consisting mainly of lymphocytes with some eosinophils. This observation of pinealitis accompanying equine uveitis supports the animal models of experimental autoimmune uveoretinitis with associated pinealitis and suggests that the pineal gland may be involved in some human uveitides.

Although laboratory studies predict pineal gland pathology accompanying immunological uveitis, there is yet no direct evidence of pineal gland pathology coincident with naturally occurring uveitis. Specimens of human pineal gland are generally not available during an active uveitis. Equine recurrent uveitis (ERU) is a naturally occurring uveitis in which tissues can be obtained from horses killed for humane reasons. We report the ocular and pineal gland histopathology of a mare killed during an episode of uveitis.

Case report
In 1986 a 2-year-old, half thoroughbred mare was brought to a stable that housed seven horses, two of which were blind as a result of recurrent uveitis. Three years later in June 1989 this mare had a 3 day episode of anorexia and lethargy. A complete blood count revealed mild anaemia (haematocrit 28-2%, normal range 32-0-53-0%). Serum chemistry was unremarkable. The signs resolved within 1 week and the haematocrit returned to 37-8%

In October 1989, this horse was examined for acute, bilateral ocular pain. Direct ophthalmoscopic examination revealed inflammatory signs in the anterior chamber, iris, and vitreous of both eyes. There was no history of ocular trauma. A diagnosis of ERU was made and the horse was treated with topical 0-1% dexamethasone and 1% atropine sulphate eye ointment (initially six times a day, tapering schedule for 6 weeks) and systemic phenylbutazone (2 g twice daily for 1 week).

In November 1989, sera of five of the horses at the stable were tested for microscopic agglutina-
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(Fig 2b). The outer segments of the photoreceptor cells were absent, but the organisation of the remaining retina was more preserved than that of the right eye.

The pineal gland of a normal horse is par-enchymal with prominent connective tissue areas (Fig 3a). In the pineal gland of this horse there was significant infiltration of these connective tissue areas (Fig 3b). The infiltration was predominantly lymphocytic with some eosinophils (Fig 4). The morphology of the pinealocytes was not overtly affected. There was no such infiltration observed in a portion of brain stem of this horse.

Discussion

We have demonstrated significant lymphocytic infiltration of the pineal gland of a horse that had clinical signs and histopathology consistent with a diagnosis of ERU as a sequel of leptospirosis.

Laboratory animals sensitised with photoreceptor cell specific autoantigens develop not only experimental autoimmune uveoretinitis but also lymphocytic infiltration of the pineal gland. This has been reported in guinea pigs, rats, rabbits, and non-human primates. An autoimmune response in both eye and pineal gland is not unexpected since both retinal photoreceptor cells and pinealocytes contain the photoreceptor cell specific proteins, used for sensitisation – that is, S-antigen, interphotoreceptor cell retinoid binding protein (IRBP), or rhodopsin. Although these models were developed to explore the immunological aspects of various human uveitides, histopathological confirmation of pineal gland pathology during active uveitis or as a sequel of uveitis has yet to be reported.

There is physiological evidence of pineal gland involvement in human uveitis, such as a decrease in nocturnal peaks of the pineal neurohormone melatonin in patients with uveitis. There is also preliminary radiological evidence of pineal gland pathology accompanying uveitis (Mitchel E Opremcak, personal communication, Cleveland Clinic).

Since it is difficult to obtain appropriate human specimens for study – that is, pineal gland tissue during active uveitis, we studied a naturally occurring uveitis in horses. ERU affects horses worldwide. It is mainly an iridocyclitis with some later involvement of the posterior portions of the eye. ERU is probably an immune-mediated sequel to trauma or systemic infection. Systemic infection with L interrogans serovar pomona has been implicated as an initiating event in both naturally occurring and in experimentally induced ERU. Horses that become blind may be killed and thus provide a source of tissue for study.

Lymphocytic infiltration of the pineal gland is probably not normal but is related to the uveitis. Reports of lymphocytes in mammalian pineal glands are limited to select murine strains and lymphocytic infiltration of some tumours of human pineal gland. Small groups of lymphocytes have been observed adjacent to the pineal gland of rats and in some human pineal glands. Lymphocytes have not been described in the pineal gland of normal horse. We have not
observed infiltration of the pineal glands of several normal horses (unpublished observation).

The immune-mediated nature of ERU is supported by immunohistochemical studies of this horse in which we have demonstrated immunoglobulin and MHC Class II antigen on infiltrating and resident cells of both eye and pineal gland. 24

In conclusion, our observation of pinealitis in naturally occurring uveitis suggests that the pineal gland may participate in some human uveitides. This finding also gives relevance to the observation of pinealitis in experimental models. Further studies of ERU will allow us to obtain more specimens during active uveitis and to follow more closely the pedigrees and environmental and infectious parameters of a given uveitis.

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