LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Thyroid eye disease associated with athyria

EDITOR,—The pathogenesis of thyroid eye disease is believed to derive from fibroblast stimulation by cytokines released by activated T lymphocytes. There is evidence of abnormal cell mediated autoimmune and humoral autoimmunity resulting in infiltration of lymphocytes and adipocytes into the extraocular muscles. The success of therapeutic immunosuppressants (steroids/azathioprine/radiotherapy) strengthens this hypothesis. A single definitive cross reacting (thyroid/retro-orbital) autoantibody has not been identified. Zhang et al found that sera from 50% of patients with thyroid eye disease reacted with an eye muscle specific protein of 55 kDa relative molecular weight. Pittsburgh data showed 67% patients with active Graves’ ophthalmopathy have antibodies against a 67 kDa mitochondrial flavo-protein subunit although it has been subsequently found in 20% of controls. They also identified a 220 kDa cell membrane specific protein known as G2S specific to eye muscle and thyroid tissue, but antibodies to this have been demonstrated in both thyroid eye disease patients and normal people. No autoantibody has been demonstrated in every case and all lack specificity. Our case demonstrates that whatever the autoimmune process may be, the presence of normal thyroid tissue or autoimmunity in affected thyroid is not essential at the time of onset and development of clinical disease.

CASE REPORT

At age 30, this woman underwent partial thyroidec- tomy for papillary thyroid cancer. At 36 years she underwent radioactive ablation (2.2 GBq iodine-131) of the residuum for suspected recurrence. At this time there was no evidence of orbital disease. At 70 years, she presented with 6 months’ diplopia and “puffy, gritty” eyes. She was clinically euthyroid on thyroxine, with bilateral proptosis (worse on the left) with conjunctival congestion, periorbital oedema, and a divergent strabismus (Fig 1) and limitation of upward gaze. A clinical diagnosis of thyroid eye disease was made, which was confirmed by orbital computed tomography (Fig 2).

Both her sister and paternal grandmother had goitres without thyroid eye disease. Her sister had thyroid microsomal antibodies.

INVESTIGATIONS

Normal triiodothyronine 1.44 nmol/l (range 1.2–2.2), mildly elevated thyroxine (174 nmol/l, normal range 58–140) in an attempt to suppress the thyroid stimulating hormone (0.9 mIU/l, normal range 0.3–4.0). A technetium-99 uptake scan showed no thyroid remnant. An iodine-123 tracer scan showed borderline evidence of uptake in the thyroid bed but avid uptake in the lower thoracic spine suggesting residual thyroid cancer with a vertebral metastasis. Her serum thyroglobulin was elevated at 28 ng/ml (normal range <1 in athyria) but there were no antithyroglobulin antibodies. Thyroid stimulating hormone antibodies were negative, as were her thyroglobulin antibodies and thyroid microsomal antibodies. All human and porcine retrobulbar autoantigens were negative including the aforementioned 56, 67, and 220 kDa protein antibodies despite the presence of metastatic thyroid tissue. Her general autoantibody profile was negative for nucleic acids, gastric parietal cell, smooth muscle, liver/kidney microsomal, mitochondrial and reticuline. The RA latex was weakly positive and the Rose-Waaler was <1:32.

Her thyroid eye disease was treated with radiotherapy to good effect. Her asymptomatic metastatic thyroid cancer is being treated with radioiodine.

COMMENT

This woman, with a family history of thyroid disease and whose sister has thyroid autoantibodies, has developed thyroid eye disease while possessing no significant normal thyroid tissue for 36 years. She was negative for the full array of routine and experimental thyroid autoantibodies and no other autoimmune disease were demonstrable.

If a humoral mechanism is relevant, then there are several possible explanations; firstly the autoantibody could be related to the sodium-iodine symporter protein in the thyroid cancer cells. That the recurrent thyroid cancer took up iodine may suggest the sodium-iodine symporter protein was present. An antibody to this protein may be a candidate for the cross reacting autoantibody but is not measured. Against this hypothesis is the fact that her sera did not cross react with porcine and human thyroid tissue screening test. Secondly, this observation could be explained by a separate or non-specific, non-thyroid specific immune response cross reacting with the orbital muscles to instigate the pathogenic process. More than one autoantibody may be able to produce thyroid eye disease or this may be part of a multifactorial immune process. Further, it is known that the severity of thyroid eye disease is not related to autoantibodies but rather to environmental factors such as smoking and iatrogenic factors such as radioiodine treatment of thyrotoxicosis.

While we accept that much current interest in the pathogenesis of thyroid eye disease, not with humoral mechanisms, but with a T cell mediated cellular immune response, it is equally pertinent that any such event was initiated and progressed in a patient with athyria.

Correspondence in this case are relevant to the understanding of the aetiology of thyroid eye disease in so far as the disease occurred in the presence of differentiated thyroid cancer but in the absence of any normal thyroid tissue or thyroid currently in autoimmunity. Thus in thyroid eye disease (and absence of any detectable amounts of the panoply of currently measurable serum autoantibodies)—this dissociation has not hitherto been recognised.

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Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy and maturity onset diabetes mellitus: is there a metabolic association?

EDITOR,—Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy (LHON) is a maternally inherited mitochondrial disease that results in bilateral visual loss. It primarily affects young men. The typical optic nerve head appearance is one of circum-papillary telangiectatic microangiopathy, swelling of the nerve fibre layer around the optic disc, and the absence of capillary leakage on fluorescein angiography. The mitochondrial inheritance of the disease was confirmed in 1988 by Wallace et al who identified a mitochondrial DNA replace-
ment mutation at nucleotide position 11778. The 11778 mutation is responsible for 31–89% of LHON pedigrees in Europe, North America, and Australia, while the 3460 and 14484 mutations each account for approximately 10–15% of cases. The discovery of the molecular basis of LHON has provided insights into the heterogeneous clinical spectrum of disease that may result. Although the causal mutations are established, the pathophysiology of the optic nerve damage is not known. The relation between metabolic dysfunction, such as diabetes mellitus, and the development of Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy has been described only rarely.

Du Bois and Feldon described a case of a 9 year old girl with juvenile onset diabetes mellitus and LHON whose vision recovered once the diabetes was well controlled. In their series of 49 Leber’s pedigrees, Newman et al described the case of another 9 year old girl with visual loss due to LHON in the setting of 6 months of unrecognised diabetes mellitus. These authors suggest that diabetes mellitus may have placed undue stress on mitochondrial function.

The following case report suggests a relation between the development of non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus and LHON in an adult patient and the expression of Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy.

CASE REPORT

In February 1998, a previously healthy 50 year old man presented with a 5 week history of progressive deterioration of vision in both eyes. Visual loss had recently been diagnosed with non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus. No family history of visual disturbance was elicited. At the time of presentation, his best corrected visual acuities were 3/60 right and 1/60 left. Anterior segment examination was normal and fundal examination revealed subtle swelling of the optic discs. Pupil reactions were normal and there was no nystagmus. He was unable to identify any of the Ishihara pseudoisochromatic plates. Visual field analysis revealed bilateral small central scotomas. A provisional diagnosis of diabetic optic neuropathy was made. The patient’s vision continued to deteriorate and by May 1998, the visual acuities were counting fingers (CF) right and near normal within 6–12 months.

COMMENT

Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy is known to segregate in a non-mendelian, maternal pattern. It is also evident that other determinants, whether genetic or epigenetic, play a part in disease expression. All the mtDNA mutations associated with LHON alter polypeptides of the mitochondrial oxidative phosphorylation chain which may lead to inhibition of cellular energy production. Epigenetic factors that may play a part in the expression of LHON include tobacco use, alcohol abuse, metabolic disease (especially diabetes mellitus),5 and trauma.6 Other systemic illnesses including hypertriglyceridaemia and Crohn’s disease have also been associated with the disease. It has been hypothesised that these conditions serve to reduce the energy for the cellular requirements of the optic nerve leading to inhibition of the function of which repairs and maintain the cell, such as DNA and RNA synthesis and protein turnover. Diabetic optic neuropathy is a recognised, though rare, condition, which must be distinguished from Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy. Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy has been described as a distinct circumscribed syndrome. Patients typically experience mild to moderate visual loss. The nature of the disc swelling ranges from minimal oedema without haemorrhage associated with capillary telangiectasia, haemorrhages, and exudates.9,10 The neuropathy may be unilateral or bilateral. Fluorescein angiography shows capillary dilatation and extravasation of dye in the region of the disc. Visual field tests may be normal, show enlarged blind spots, or central scotomas.11 The disc oedema clears with time and vision typically returns to normal or near normal within 6–12 months11 leaving residual nerve fibre bundle field defects and/or optic atrophy. In cases of suspected diabetic optic neuropathy, with progressive visual loss and circumpapillary capillary dilatation which does not leak on fluorescein angiography, a diagnosis of LHON warrants consideration.

This case highlights the possibility that patients labelled in the past as having diabetic optic neuropathy may have had an additional unrecognised Leber’s hereditary optic neuropathy.

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Free conjunctival autograft harvested from the fornix for repair of leaking blebs

EDITOR,—In a previously reported technique of free conjunctival autograft for the repair of leaking blebs, the distance from the limbus to the harvesting site was not specified. In these reports, the graft was stated to have been excised, which makes future filtration surgery difficult at that site. We believe that even in the contralateral eye or the inferior quadrant of the same eye, paralimbal conjunctiva are sites for potential future filtration surgery in most cases. Busont et al stated that grafts should not be taken from the fornix because this can induce foreshortening and lid malposition if both palpebral and bulbar conjunctiva are excised.1 We found that grafts can be harvested from the fornix with no complications, thus preserving the potential filtration sites.

CASE REPORTS

In six eyes of four patients, we repaired persistent leaking blebs after trabeculectomy by transplanting free conjunctival autografts harvested from the fornix. Grafts were harvested from the fornix side of the leaking blebs when possible. When the intact conjunctiva of the fornix side of a leaking bleb was very narrow, the graft was harvested from the other quadrant, 5–6 mm away from the limbus. The procedure followed the previously reported technique,1 except for the site from which the graft was harvested. The aqueous leaks were repaired successfully, and filtering function was maintained in all cases. Two eyes of two patients required β blocker treatment to maintain satisfactory intraocular pressure after the repair surgery. Over an average follow up of 9 months (range 6–12 months), none of the eyes had significant complications, including either adhesion between palpebral and bulbar conjunctiva or lid malposition.

The case series are described in Table 1.

Table 1  Clinical characteristics of the case series

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Eye</th>
<th>Indications for LEC</th>
<th>LEC to repairing</th>
<th>Site for LEC</th>
<th>Harvested site</th>
<th>Graft size (DB/DM)</th>
<th>Follow up (months)</th>
<th>Last IOP (mm Hg)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>POAG</td>
<td>10 days</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>6×5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>POAG</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>9×5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>POAG</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>upper nasal</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>9×7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>POAG secondary</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>upper nasal</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>10×6</td>
<td>17×10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>POAG secondary</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>upper nasal</td>
<td>upper</td>
<td>6×5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

LEG = trabeculectomy, POAG = primary open angle glaucoma, DP = diameter parallel to the limbus, DV = diameter vertical to the limbus, IOP = intraocular pressure. 
*β blocker treatment.
COMMENT
We believe that the optimal site for harvesting conjunctival autografts is the fornix side of the leaking bleb, because it has almost no potential as a future filtration site. The paralimbal conjunctiva of the contralateral eye is often a potential future filtration site, since glaucoma is often bilateral. Even with a diagnosis of “unilateral glaucoma” at the time of bleb reconstruction, the potential for development of glaucoma in the contralateral eye cannot be completely excluded. A persistent bleb leak that requires total reconstruction is frequently encountered in eyes that have undergone multiple procedures and treatment with adjunctive antimetabolites.1,2 These situations are mostly encountered in eyes with refractory glaucoma, which often have little intact paralimbal conjunctiva remaining but have a high potential for multiple filtration surgeries. We believe that intact conjunctiva within 3 mm from the limbus is needed to perform a successful filtration surgery. The reported distances of the conjunctival fornix from the limbus are as follows: upper, 8–10 mm; temporal, 14 mm; lower, 8–10 mm; nasal, 7 mm. These data indicate that conjunctiva may be taken from the upper or lower quadrant, and is most easily taken from the temporal quadrant when harvesting a graft 5 mm away from the limbus. No special attention was required to avoid excising the palpebral conjunctiva during this procedure. Excising the palpebral conjunctiva may be technically difficult during this procedure. We conclude that harvesting a graft from the fornix should be considered when reconstruction surgery is performed with free conjunctival autografts for leaking blebs.

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Five cases of thelaziasis

EDITOR.—We report five cases of thelaziasis, including a rare case of infection of a hospital inpatient. Thelaziasis is a nematode infection of ocular tissue that is caused by Thelazia calipeda, which is found in China, India, Thailand, Korea, and Japan. This parasite has been identified in the conjunctival sac, and lacrimal gland and canal of dogs, cats, cows, badgers, rabbits, foxes, and monkeys in Asia.1

Thelaziasis results when flies ingest embryonated eggs in the ocular tissue of an infected host; the eggs develop into larvae and are deposited onto the conjunctiva of a new host. Drosophilae—namely, Amoto okada, A magna, and A nagatai—are the intermediate hosts.2

To our knowledge, with the exception of Japan 157 cases have been reported worldwide (China, 124; Korea, 24; Thailand, 5; India, 2; Russian and Indonesia, 1 each). In Japan, approximately 100 cases have been reported, mostly in the western regions, especially in Kyushu (66 cases).3,4 To date, there have been no reported cases of inpatient infections.

CASE REPORTS

The clinical features of the five patients are summarised in Table 1. Patients (three men, two women; ages, 20–83 years) were examined at Muikaiti Hospital and Tawanokyou Hospital from 1989 to 1999. Patients 1, 2, 3, 4 were outpatients, but patient 5 was an inpatient who had been hospitalised for more than a year. There were no other cases in the same hospital ward or infection of medical personnel. All patients were infected unilaterally (three right eyes, two left eyes). The patients’ subjective symptoms were foreign body sensation, visual disorder, and ocular pain. Patient 5 had senile dementia and her symptoms are unknown. Clinical findings were conjunctival congestion, follicles, and whitish worms in the conjunctiva. Patients did not report having had flies in their eyes, but do keep animals such as dogs, cats, and cows. They had never visited the Kyushu region of Japan. The worms were removed (two to five worms per patient) with forceps using topical anaesthesia and antibiotic eye drops (Fig 1). The patients’ symptoms resolved and there were no recurrences. The presence of the Thelazia calipeda worms was confirmed by parasitologists.

COMMENT

Kirschner et al reported a case of conjunctivitis caused by Thelazia californiensis and a fly was believed to have been the possible mode of transmission in the Sierra Mountain foothills of California.1 Mimori et al reported Thelazia calipeda infection in a man in Kumamoto Prefecture, Japan, who resided in the mountains.2 The hospitals in which our patients were examined are located in remote mountainous regions of Shimane Prefecture in western Honshu. Patients lived in the suburbs in which the hospitals were located; the infections might have occurred in their places of residence.

In the case of the infection of the inpatient, the infection route is unclear. Some farms that raise beef cattle are located near the hospital, and it is possible that flies from these farms transported the parasite to the hospital.

The authors have no proprietary interest in any aspect of this report.

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Fish hook injury of the eyelid: an unusual case

EDITOR.—Reports of ocular fish hook injuries are uncommon in the literature. In the context of a recent case report by Krott and co-authors,1 I would like to add my experience with a rather unusual case of fish hook injury to the eyelid.

A 44 year old man presented to the casualty department with a fish hook embedded in his

Table 1 Details of five cases of thelaziasis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient No</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Year examined</th>
<th>Infected eye</th>
<th>No of worms</th>
<th>Symptoms and ocular pain</th>
<th>History</th>
<th>Visual disorder</th>
<th>Foreign body sensation</th>
<th>Foreign body sensation</th>
<th>Foreign body sensation</th>
<th>Conjunctival congestion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conjunctival congestion</td>
<td>Clinical findings and follicles</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Right</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Conjunctival congestion</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Left</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conjunctival congestion</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Right</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Conjunctival congestion</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Patient 5. Slight conjunctival congestion and a worm in the right conjunctival sac.
Methaemoglobinemia after peribulbar blockade: an unusual complication in ophthalmic surgery

EDITOR,—Peribulbar blockade is frequently used for anaesthesia in ophthalmic surgery. Owing to its short onset time and low incidence of cardiac and central nervous system toxicity, the local anaesthetic prilocaine is a popular choice for peribulbar blockade. Prilocaine is, however, the most potent methaemoglobin forming local anaesthetic. Methaemoglobinemia may be the result of primary or secondary (acquired) causes. Genetic conditions resulting in methaemoglobinemia include mutagenic defects of haemoglobin and congenital reductase enzyme deficiency.1 Acquired methaemoglobinemia may be caused by oxidant drugs that overwhelm the body’s ability to limit methaemoglobin formation via enzymatic reduction. Local anaesthetics are the most common cause of perioperative methaemoglobinemia.2 Prilocaine is the most potent methaemoglobin forming local anaesthetic. Methaemoglobin formation is dose dependent and correlates with the rate of systemic absorption. In general, doses less than 600 mg in adults are thought not to increase the patient’s risk of methaemoglobinemia.1 Despite this, the administration of only 80 mg in the present case resulted in methaemoglobinemia. However, several predisposing factors may have contributed to the enhanced formation of methaemoglobin. Firstly, the risk of prilocaine induced methaemoglobinemia in patients with renal failure may be increased because metabolic acidosis increases ionised prilocaine serum levels. Further, the unbound fraction of prilocaine may be elevated in renal failure as a result of decreased serum proteins.3 Additionally, regular intake of isosorbide dinitrate which is also associated with methaemoglobin formation may have already predisposed this patient to the development of methaemoglobin formation. Finally, it is possible that our patient may also have suffered from an undiagnosed genetic predisposition to methaemoglobin formation. Although an abnormal haemoglobin pattern was ruled out by electrophoresis, we did not rule out a deficiency in methaemoglobin reductase enzymes such as NADH dependent methaemoglobin reductase. Thus, this patient had several underlying factors that may have predisposed her to prilocaine induced methaemoglobinemia.

In conclusion, small concentrations of prilocaine can cause methaemoglobinemia when used for peribulbar blockade in patients with reduced tolerance to oxidant drugs.

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