

Current Awareness in Clinical Toxicology

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September 2007

CURRENT AWARENESS PAPERS OF THE MONTH

Management of acute organophosphorus pesticide poisoning

Eddleston M, Buckley NA, Eyer P, Dawson AH. Lancet, 2007; pre-publication online.

Abstract: Organophosphorus pesticide self-poisoning is an important clinical problem in rural regions of the developing world, and kills an estimated 200 000 people every year. Unintentional poisoning kills far fewer people but is a problem in places where highly toxic organophosphorus pesticides are available. Medical management is difficult, with case fatality generally more than 15%. We describe the limited evidence that can guide therapy and the factors that should be considered when designing further clinical studies. 50 years after first use, we still do not know how the core treatments-atropine, oximes, and diazepam-should best be given. Important constraints in the collection of useful data have included the late recognition of great variability in activity and action of the individual pesticides, and the care needed cholinesterase assays for results to be comparable between studies. However, consensus suggests that early resuscitation with atropine, oxygen, respiratory support, and fluids is needed to improve oxygen delivery to tissues. The role of oximes is not completely clear; they might benefit only patients poisoned by specific pesticides or patients with moderate poisoning. Small studies suggest benefit from new treatments such as magnesium sulphate, but much larger trials are needed. Gastric lavage could have a role but should only be undertaken once the patient is stable. Randomised controlled trials are underway in rural Asia to assess the effectiveness of these therapies. However, some organophosphorus pesticides might prove very difficult to treat with current therapies, such that bans on particular pesticides could be the only method to substantially reduce the case fatality after poisoning. Improved medical management of organophosphorus poisoning should result in a reduction in worldwide deaths from suicide.

A decade after the Tokyo sarin attack: a review of neurological follow-up of the victims

Hoffman A, Eisenkraft A, Finkelstein A, Schein O, Rotman E, Dushnitsky TI. Mil Med 2007; 172: 607-10.

Objective: On March 20, 1995, sarin gas was used in Tokyo by members of the Japanese "Uhm-Shinrikiu" cult, killing 12 and injuring > 5,500 innocent people. Most of the casualties were mildly injured. This article reviews the neurological follow-up data for some of the victims over the past decade.

Methods: We reviewed the published literature regarding neurological follow-up of the victims,

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***Produced for the American Academy of Clinical Toxicology
by the Birmingham Unit of the UK National Poisons
Information Service***

dividing the data according to the time elapsed after the attack.

Results: The digit span test, finger-tapping test, and computerized posturography were the only performance tests that showed statistically significant differences between the victims and the control groups in some of the surveys. The main sequela 7 years after the attack was post-traumatic stress disorder.

Conclusions: The results emphasize the need for a national preparedness program for such mass casualty events, led by national health systems. This should include long-term, neurological, follow-up monitoring with performance tests and a post-traumatic stress disorder screening test.

Chronic valproic acid intoxication: reversal by naloxone

Thanacoody HKR. Emerg Med J 2007; 24: 677-8.

Abstract: A 76-year-old woman being treated with sodium valproate for bipolar depression presented with a 4 day history of acute confusion and tremulousness. She had apnoeic episodes, reduced conscious level and generalised myoclonic movements. Her plasma valproate concentration was 848 $\mu\text{mol/l}$ (normal 300-600 $\mu\text{mol/l}$). Administration of naloxone 0.8 mg led to rapid clinical improvement. Naloxone may be useful in reversing the features of chronic valproate toxicity.

Impact of restricting paracetamol pack sizes on paracetamol poisoning in the United Kingdom: a review of the literature

Hawkins LC, Edwards JN, Dargan PI. Drug Saf 2007; 30: 465-79.

Abstract: Paracetamol (acetaminophen) is the most common drug taken in overdose in the UK, accounting for 48% of poisoning admissions to hospital and being involved in an estimated 100-200 deaths per year. In 1998, the UK government introduced legislation that reduced the maximum pack size of all non-effervescent tablets and capsules containing aspirin (acetylsalicylic acid) or paracetamol that can be sold or supplied from outlets other than registered pharmacies from 25 to 16 tablets or capsules. This article reviews the literature to determine the effectiveness of the legislation, focusing specifically on paracetamol poisoning.

Seventeen studies on this subject were identified. Three studies found reductions in mortality rates; one study found an increase in mortality rates, while one found an initial reduction followed by an eventual increase; three found no significant difference in mortality rates before and after introduction of the legislation. Five studies found reductions in admissions to liver units, three of these finding a reduction in liver transplantation rates; two further studies found no change in liver function tests and rates of paracetamol-induced acute liver injury or failure. Four studies found a sustained decrease in hospital admissions, while two found an initial decrease followed by an eventual increase. One study found a decline in admissions for paracetamol poisoning and an increase in admissions for non-paracetamol poisoning.

Sales data are conflicting, with two studies finding no significant difference in paracetamol sales before and after the introduction of the legislation and one reporting a decline. The severity of overdose appears to have decreased since the maximum permitted packet size was reduced, with five studies reporting a reduction in the number of severe overdoses (measured by numbers of tablets ingested, serum paracetamol concentrations and usage of antidotes). Only two studies reported an increase in the number of severe overdoses.

Paracetamol-associated mortality rates, admissions to liver units/liver transplants, hospital admissions and the severity of paracetamol overdose appear to have been decreasing since 1998. However, one study showed that the reductions in mortality and hospital admissions began in 1997; therefore, the contribution of the 1998 legislation to the observed changes is unclear. Most of the studies are based on short-term follow-up so it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding long-term trends. Many of the studies were also restricted to relatively small areas of the UK; this, combined with a variety of outcome measures, makes it difficult to distinguish any

conclusive trends. The studies also suffer from a lack of comparison and control groups. Some studies do not clearly differentiate between the paracetamol preparations covered by the legislation and those not.

The limited number of studies to date, combined with a variety of outcome measures, make it difficult to determine with accuracy whether or not the legislation has been a success. More long-term studies are needed to fully assess the impact of the legislation.

Escitalopram ingestions reported to Texas poison control centers, 2002-2005

Forrester MB. Hum Exp Toxicol 2007; 26: 473-82.

Abstract: Limited information exists on potentially adverse escitalopram ingestions reported to poison control centers. Using isolated escitalopram ingestions reported to Texas poison control centers during 2002-2005, the proportion of cases involving serious medical outcomes was determined for selected variables and evaluated for statistical significance by calculating the rate ratio (RR) and 95% confidence interval (CI). Of 1179 cases identified, 234 (20%) involved serious outcomes. Serious outcomes were significantly more likely to occur with a maximum dose of >100 mg (RR 4.69, CI 2.529.29) or >5 tablets (RR 4.96, CI 2.948.93), where the circumstances of the exposures involved self-harm or malicious intent (RR 3.21, CI 2.424.29), or when the patient was already at or en route to a health care facility when the poison control center was contacted (RR 7.88, CI 4.3115.79) or referred to a health care facility by the poison control center (RR 15.91, CI 8.7831.64). The severity of the outcome associated with isolated escitalopram ingestions depended on the dose and the circumstances of the ingestion. The management of patients with serious outcomes were more likely to involve health care facilities. Such information is useful for creating triage guidelines for the management of escitalopram ingestions.

Maternal use of selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors in early pregnancy and infant congenital malformations

Källén BAJ, Olausson PO. Birth Defects Res A Clin Mol Teratol 2007; 79: 301-8.

Background: Maternal use of selective serotonin re uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) has recently been associated with an increased risk for certain malformations.

Methods: Using the Swedish Medical Birth Register, we identified women who had reported the use of SSRIs in early pregnancy and studied their infants, born between July 1, 1995 and the end of 2004. Congenital malformations were identified from that register, from the Register of Congenital Malformations, and from the Hospital Discharge Register. The effect of drug exposure was studied after adjustment for a number of identified maternal characteristics that could act as confounders.

Results: We identified 6,481 women who reported the use of SSRIs in early pregnancy and their 6,555 infants. There was no general increase in malformation risk. An increased risk for cystic kidneys was seen, but this was based on only nine malformed infants, and the pathology varied between these cases. An in depth study of cardiovascular defects identified an association between such defects and notably ventricular and atrial septum defects and maternal use of paroxetine but not other SSRIs. No support for a postulated association between SSRI use and infant craniostenosis or omphalocele was found.

Conclusions: Use of SSRIs in early pregnancy does not seem to be a major risk factor for infant malformations. The association between paroxetine use and infant cardiovascular defects may be a result of multiple testing, but is supported by other studies.

Severe acute arsine poisoning treated by plasma exchange

Song Y, Wang D, Li H, Hao F, Ma J, Xia Y. Clin Toxicol 2007; 45: 721-7.

Introduction: Exposure to arsine gas can cause fatal hemolysis and multiorgan damage. Whole blood exchange transfusion and hemodialysis have been recommended to treat severe acute

arsine poisoning, but are associated with significant complications and sub-optimal outcomes. Plasma exchange is another method of blood purification technique but there are no data on its use in acute arsine poisoning. This retrospective study evaluated the clinical and effects and arsenic clearance from the use of plasma exchange treatment of patients with acute arsine poisoning.

Methods: Data from patients with severe acute arsine poisoning, treated with plasma exchange from December 2000 to December 2005 were collected and analyzed. Measured laboratory factors, performed before and after plasma exchange treatment included routine biochemistry and hematology tests as well as arsenic concentrations in blood, urine, and discarded plasma.

Results: During the study period, 12 patients with severe acute arsine poisoning were treated with plasma exchange. Plasma exchange was performed one or two times on each patient, during which the replacement fluid was fresh frozen plasma (total volume ranged from 1400 to 4000 mL). The range of concentrations of arsenic in discarded plasma was 27.7 to 88.7 mg/L and the range of total arsenic removed by plasma exchange was 55.4 to 177.4 mg. Plasma exchange appears to rapidly terminate arsine-induced hemolysis and favorably modify damage to the kidneys and other organs. Laboratory factors that showed significant association with treatment response were creatine kinase, lactate dehydrogenase, blood urea nitrogen, total bilirubin, and heart-related enzymes. All patients recovered from the poisoning and were in good condition at a 2 to 3 months follow-up.

Conclusions: Plasma exchange appears to be an effective treatment intervention for patients with severe acute arsine poisoning. It is suggested that it be used as early as possible.

Neuropsychological study of ciguatera fish poisoning: a longitudinal case-control study

Friedman MA, Arena P, Levin B, Fleming L, Fernandez M, Weisman R, Bernstein J, Schrank K, Blythe D, Backer L, Reich A. Arch Clin Neuropsychol 2007; 22: 545-53.

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to evaluate the neuropsychological effects of ciguatera fish poisoning (CFP).

Method: In a longitudinal matched cohort study, 12 CFP cases and 12 matched friend-controls received baseline neuropsychological evaluations within one month after intoxication and follow-up evaluations approximately six months after baseline.

Results: Only one case received intravenous mannitol treatment, which occurred 10 or more days after intoxication. At baseline and follow-up evaluations, there were no statistically significant differences between CFP cases and controls on cognitive measures. At baseline, however, CFP cases endorsed significantly greater subjective toxicity symptoms (e.g. fatigue, tingling sensations) and greater anxiety symptoms than controls. Follow-up evaluations suggested resolution of all symptoms after six months. Subsequent analyses, in which data from this study were pooled with data from an earlier pilot study, supported these results.

Conclusion: Untreated ciguatera was associated acutely with significant subjective neurotoxicity symptoms and anxiety which were transient, but not with objectively measured cognitive changes. Future investigation with a larger sample size is warranted.

Ischemic and thrombotic effects of dilute diesel-exhaust inhalation in men with coronary heart disease

Mills NL, Törnqvist H, Gonzalez MC, Vink E, Robinson SD, Söderberg S, Boon NA, Donaldson K, Sandström T, Blomberg A, Newby DE. N Engl J Med 2007; 357: 1075-82.

Background: Exposure to air pollution from traffic is associated with adverse cardiovascular events. The mechanisms for this association are unknown. We conducted a controlled exposure to dilute diesel exhaust in patients with stable coronary heart disease to determine the direct effect of air pollution on myocardial, vascular, and fibrinolytic function.

Methods: In a double-blind, randomized, crossover study, 20 men with prior myocardial infarction were exposed, in two separate sessions, to dilute diesel exhaust (300 µg per cubic meter) or filtered air for 1 hour during periods of rest and moderate exercise in a controlled-exposure facility. During the exposure, myocardial ischemia was quantified by ST-segment analysis using continuous 12-lead electrocardiography. Six hours after exposure, vasomotor and fibrinolytic function were assessed by means of intraarterial agonist infusions.

Results: During both exposure sessions, the heart rate increased with exercise ($P < 0.001$); the increase was similar during exposure to diesel exhaust and exposure to filtered air ($P = 0.67$). Exercise-induced ST-segment depression was present in all patients, but there was a greater increase in the ischemic burden during exposure to diesel exhaust (22 ± 4 vs. 8 ± 6 millivolt seconds, $P < 0.001$). Exposure to diesel exhaust did not aggravate preexisting vasomotor dysfunction, but it did reduce the acute release of endothelial tissue plasminogen activator ($P = 0.009$; 35% decrease in the area under the curve).

Conclusions: Brief exposure to dilute diesel exhaust promotes myocardial ischemia and inhibits endogenous fibrinolytic capacity in men with stable coronary heart disease. Our findings point to ischemic and thrombotic mechanisms that may explain in part the observation that exposure to combustion-derived air pollution is associated with adverse cardiovascular events.

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Current Awareness in Clinical Toxicology is produced monthly by the Birmingham Unit
of the UK National Poisons Information Service.

The NPIS is commissioned by the UK Health Protection Agency.

