

Current Awareness in Clinical Toxicology

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October 2010

CURRENT AWARENESS PAPERS OF THE MONTH

Multiplying the serum aminotransferase by the acetaminophen concentration to predict toxicity following overdose

Sivilotti MLA, Green TJ, Langmann C, Yarema M, Juurlink D, Johnson D. *Clin Toxicol* 2010; online early: doi: 10.3109/15563650.2010.523829: 1-7.

Context

The first available predictors of hepatic injury following acetaminophen (APAP) overdose are the serum APAP and aminotransferases [AT, i.e., aspartate (AST) aminotransferase or alanine (ALT) aminotransferase].

Objective

We describe the initial value, rate of change, and interrelationship between these biomarkers in patients who develop hepatotoxicity despite treatment following acute overdose. A new parameter, the APAP × AT multiplication product, is proposed for early risk stratification.

Methods

We conducted a descriptive study of individuals selected from a multicenter retrospective cohort of patients hospitalized for APAP poisoning. We selected those acute APAP overdose patients who subsequently developed AT > 1,000 IU/L. Rising serum AT values were compared to simultaneously measured (or estimated) falling serum APAP. The APAP × AT was expressed relative to initiation of acetylcysteine therapy and grouped by time to meeting hepatotoxicity criteria.

Results

In the 94 cases studied, serum APAP concentrations were still appreciable [median 570 (interquartile range (IQR) 314-983) μmol/L] at the time of the first measured AT [211 (77-511) IU/L at 15.3 (12.1-19.2) h post-ingestion], yielding an initial APAP × AT of 99000 (52000-240000) μmol × IU/L². Because serum AT rose rapidly (doubling time 9.5 h) and APAP fell slowly (half-life 4.8 h), the multiplication product remained elevated during the first 12-24 h of antidotal therapy, especially among patients who developed earlier hepatotoxicity (AT > 1000 IU/L).

Discussion and conclusions

The APAP × AT multiplication product, calculated at the time of presentation and after several h of antidotal therapy, holds promise as a new risk predictor following APAP overdose. It requires neither graphical interpretation nor accurate time of ingestion, two limitations to current risk stratification.

Current Awareness in Clinical Toxicology is produced monthly for the EAPCCT by the Birmingham Unit of the UK National Poisons Information Service. The NPIS is commissioned by the Health Protection Agency.



Effects of delay in infusion of N-acetylcysteine on appearance of adverse drug reactions after acetaminophen overdose: a retrospective study

Zyoud SH, Awang R, Sulaiman SA, Al-Jabi SW. *Pharmacoepidemiol Drug Saf* 2010; 19: 1064-70.

Purpose

To investigate the relationship between different types of adverse drug reaction (ADR) and late time to N-acetylcysteine (NAC) infusion in patients presenting to the hospital with acetaminophen overdose.

Methods

This is a retrospective study of patients admitted to the hospital for acute acetaminophen overdose over a period of 5 years (1 January 2004- 31 December 2008). The primary outcome of interest was the relationship between ADR, if any, and late time to NAC infusion. Parametric and non-parametric tests were used to test differences between groups depending on the normality of the data. SPSS 15 was used for data analysis.

Results

Of 305 patients with acetaminophen overdose, 146 (47.9%) were treated with intravenous NAC and 139 (45.6%) were included in this study. Different types of ADR were observed in 94 (67.6%) patients. Late time to NAC infusion was significantly associated with cutaneous anaphylactoid reactions when compared to patients without this type of ADR ($p < 0.001$). However, there were no significant differences in time to NAC infusion between patients with and without the following ADR: gastrointestinal reactions ($p = 0.11$), respiratory reactions ($p = 0.77$), central nervous reactions ($p = 0.64$), and cardiovascular reactions ($p = 0.63$).

Conclusion

Late time to NAC infusion is a risk factor for developing cutaneous anaphylactoid reactions, suggesting, rather than proving, that early NAC infusion (≤ 8 hours) may be protective against this type of ADR.

Relationship between serum acetaminophen concentration and N-acetylcysteine-induced adverse drug reactions

Zyoud SH, Awang R, Sulaiman SAS, Khan HRM, Sawalha AF, Sweileh WM, Al-Jabi SW. *Basic Clin Pharmacol Toxicol* 2010; 107: 718-23.

Abstract

Intravenous N-acetylcysteine is usually regarded as a safe antidote. However, during the infusion of the loading dose, different types of adverse drug reactions (ADR) may occur. The objective of this study was to investigate the relation between the incidence of different types of ADR and serum acetaminophen concentration in patients presenting to the hospital with acetaminophen overdose.

This is a retrospective study of patients admitted to the hospital for acute acetaminophen overdose over a period of 5 years (1 January 2004 to 31 December 2008). Parametric and non-parametric tests were used to test differences between groups depending on the normality of the data. SPSS 15 was used for data analysis.

Of 305 patients with acetaminophen overdose, 146 (47.9%) were treated with intravenous N-acetylcysteine and 139 (45.6%) were included in this study. Different types of ADR were observed in 94 (67.6%) patients. Low serum acetaminophen concentrations were significantly associated with cutaneous anaphylactoid reactions but not other types of ADR. Low serum acetaminophen concentration was significantly associated with flushing ($p < 0.001$), rash ($p < 0.001$) and pruritus ($p < 0.001$). However, there were no significant differences in serum acetaminophen concentrations between patients with and without the following ADR: gastrointestinal reactions ($p = 0.77$), respiratory reactions ($p = 0.96$), central nervous reactions ($p = 0.82$) and cardiovascular

reactions ($p = 0.37$).

In conclusion, low serum acetaminophen concentrations were associated with higher cutaneous anaphylactoid reactions. Such high serum acetaminophen concentrations may be protective against N-acetylcysteine-induced cutaneous ADR.

Should phenytoin or barbiturates be used as second-line anticonvulsant therapy for toxicological seizures?

Shah ASV, Eddleston M. Clin Toxicol 2010; online early: doi: 10.3109/15563650.2010.521506: 1-6.

Introduction

Seizures are a common sequela of self-poisoning. However, their mechanism differs from seizures of other etiologies. Toxicological seizures result from alterations in the excitatory and inhibitory balance of otherwise normal neurons. In contrast, idiopathic or trauma related seizures usually start with a focus of abnormal neurons. For both forms of seizures, benzodiazepines are recommended as first-line therapy; however, there is debate about the use of phenytoin or barbiturates for second-line therapy.

Methods and Results

In this article, we systematically review the evidence for the use of these drugs as second-line therapy for toxicological seizures. Barbiturates complement the anticonvulsant effect of benzodiazepines at the GABA_A receptor by increasing the duration of chloride channel opening; phenytoin blocks voltage-dependent sodium channels to inhibit propagation from active electrical foci, an effect more useful for nontoxicological seizures. We found no randomized controlled trial comparing phenytoin and barbiturates in toxicological seizures refractory to benzodiazepines; similarly no trial was found comparing the use of these drugs in nonpoisoned patients. Animal studies indicate that phenobarbital has greater effectiveness than phenytoin for many poisons; a few case reports suggest a better response in patients.

Conclusion

Despite the lack of high-quality clinical trial data, pharmacological knowledge and animal studies suggest that phenobarbital or thiopentone should be second-line agents for controlling toxicological seizures. The role of newer agents such as propofol and levetiracetam in toxicological seizures is currently unclear because of a lack of clinical or animal studies.

Cocaine, metamfetamine, and MDMA abuse: the role and clinical importance of neuroadaptation

Seger D. Clin Toxicol 2010; 48: 695-708.

Introduction

This article reviews the role and clinical importance of specific neuroadaptations that may occur following use of cocaine, metamfetamine, and 3,4-methylenedioxymetamfetamine (MDMA).

Methods

A literature search was performed using OVID MEDLINE and PubMed for all years to the present date, which identified 250 papers of which 154 were considered relevant.

Mechanisms of action of cocaine and metamfetamine

Cocaine and metamfetamine increase central nervous system synaptic dopamine primarily by increasing the release of dopamine into the synapse and binding to the dopamine reuptake transporter, which prevents the reuptake of dopamine from the synapse back into the nerve cell. Synaptic dopamine then stimulates post synaptic receptors. The continued release of dopamine and prevention of reuptake results in a supraphysiological concentration of dopamine, which causes euphoria or a "high." The greater the concentration of dopamine, the greater the high. Continued supraphysiological concentrations of dopamine and postsynaptic receptor stimulation may cause physiological and anatomical changes (neuroadaptations) in the central nervous system (CNS)

synapse that attempt to maintain homeostasis. An example of a dopaminergic neuroadaptation is the decrease in number of post synaptic D2 receptors that occurs when synaptic dopamine concentrations remain supraphysiological. This neuroadaptation attempts to maintain homeostasis, that is, the decreased number of D2 receptors provides fewer receptors to be constantly stimulated by increased synaptic dopamine. Although metamfetamine also increases synaptic dopamine similarly to cocaine, metamfetamine also increases cytoplasmic dopamine, which causes CNS oxidative stress and neurotoxicity. The clinical impact of the oxidative stress is unknown.

Mechanisms of action of MDMA

MDMA increases concentrations of synaptic serotonin by increasing the release of serotonin and binding to the serotonin reuptake transporter, preventing the reuptake of serotonin from the synapse back into the nerve cell. An example of a serotonergic neuroadaptation is a decrease in the number of serotonin presynaptic autoreceptors (one of the regulators of synaptic serotonin concentration) to maintain homeostasis. MDMA also causes a decrease in serotonergic biochemical markers and neuronal axotomy in rats and nonhuman primates. Abstinence may allow reinnervation, but the axonal regrowth pattern is abnormal. Whether axotomy and reinnervation also occur in humans is unknown. Pharmacogenomics may play a role in the varied response of the individual to MDMA.

Conclusions

Neuroadaptations may be transient or permanent. The duration of drug use or drug concentration needed to cause neuroadaptations is unknown, but some neuroadaptations begin shortly after initiation of drug use and are dependent on variables such as genetics and age at the initiation of use. Understanding the concept of neuroadaptation and some specific neuroadaptations that occur will allow clinicians to better understand the interindividual variability in response to drugs of abuse.

The clinical toxicology of metamfetamine

Schep LJ, Slaughter RJ, Beasley DM. Clin Toxicol 2010; 48: 675-94.

Introduction

Metamfetamine is a highly addictive amfetamine analog that acts primarily as a central nervous system (CNS) stimulant. The escalating abuse of this drug in recent years has led to an increasing burden upon health care providers. An understanding of the drug's toxic effects and their medical treatment is therefore essential for the successful management of patients suffering this form of intoxication.

Aim

The aim of this review is to summarize all main aspects of metamfetamine poisoning including epidemiology, mechanisms of toxicity, toxicokinetics, clinical features, diagnosis, and management.

Methods

A summary of the literature on metamfetamine was compiled by systematically searching OVID MEDLINE and ISI Web of Science. Further information was obtained from book chapters, relevant news reports, and web material.

Epidemiology

Following its use in the Second World War, metamfetamine gained popularity as an illicit drug in Japan and later the United States. Its manufacture and use has now spread to include East and South-East Asia, North America, Mexico, and Australasia, and its world-wide usage, when combined with amfetamine, exceeds that of all other drugs of abuse except cannabis.

Mechanisms of toxicity

Metamfetamine acts principally by stimulating the enhanced release of catecholamines from sympathetic nerve terminals, particularly of dopamine in the mesolimbic, mesocortical, and nigrostriatal pathways. The consequent elevation of intra-synaptic monoamines results in an increased activation of central and peripheral α - and β -adrenergic postsynaptic receptors. This can cause detrimental neuropsychological, cardiovascular, and other systemic effects, and, following long-term abuse, neuronal apoptosis and nerve terminal degeneration. Toxicokinetics. Metamfetamine is rapidly absorbed and well distributed throughout the body, with extensive

distribution across high lipid content tissues such as the blood-brain barrier. In humans the major metabolic pathways are aromatic hydroxylation producing 4-hydroxymetamphetamine and N-demethylation to form amphetamine. Metamphetamine is excreted predominantly in the urine and to a lesser extent by sweating and fecal excretion, with reported terminal half-lives ranging from approximately 5-30 h.

Clinical features

The clinical effects of metamphetamine poisoning can vary widely, depending on dose, route, duration, and frequency of use. They are predominantly characteristic of an acute sympathomimetic toxidrome. Common features reported include tachycardia, hypertension, chest pain, various cardiac dysrhythmias, vasculitis, headache, cerebral hemorrhage, hyperthermia, tachypnea, and violent and aggressive behaviour.

Management

Emergency stabilization of vital functions and supportive care is essential. Benzodiazepines alone may adequately relieve agitation, hypertension, tachycardia, psychosis, and seizure, though other specific therapies can also be required for sympathomimetic effects and their associated complications.

Conclusion

Metamphetamine may cause severe sympathomimetic effects in the intoxicated patient. However, with appropriate, symptom-directed supportive care, patients can be expected to make a full recovery.

Validation of a 6-hour observation period for cocaine body stuffers

Moreira M, Buchanan J, Heard K. Am J Emerg Med 2010; online early: doi: 10.1016/j.ajem.2009.11.022:

Abstract

Often, patients are brought in to the emergency department after ingesting large amounts of cocaine in an attempt to conceal it. This act is known as body stuffing. The observation period required to recognize potential toxic adverse effects in these patients is not well described in the literature.

We sought to validate a treatment algorithm for asymptomatic cocaine body stuffers using a 6-h observation period by observing the clinical course of cocaine body stuffers over a 24-h period. A retrospective chart review was performed on all patients evaluated for witnessed or suspected stuffing over 2 years using a standardized protocol. One hundred six patients met final inclusion criteria as adult cocaine stuffers. No patients developed life-threatening symptoms, and no patients died during observation.

In our medical setting, stuffers could be discharged after a 6-h observation period if there was either complete resolution or absence of clinical symptoms.

Levamisole: a dangerous new cocaine adulterant

Chang A, Osterloh J, Thomas J. Clin Pharmacol Ther 2010; 88: 408-11.

Abstract

Levamisole has increasingly been discovered in street cocaine as an adulterant. Recent reports have linked levamisole in street cocaine to agranulocytosis in cocaine users. It is well known that agranulocytosis is associated with therapeutic use of levamisole, and this may have led to the withdrawal of the drug from the US market.

Levamisole was a US Food and Drug Administration-approved drug that has been used as an immunomodulator, a chemotherapy adjuvant, and anthelmintic medication. The purpose of adulterating street cocaine with levamisole is not known, but it has been speculated that it is added intentionally in order to potentiate the effects of cocaine.

This may be supported by the recent report of metabolism of levamisole to aminorex in racehorses. Aminorex and related compounds, specifically 4-methylaminorex, or "ice," have high

abuse potential because of their amphetamine-like pharmacological activity. This metabolism has not been reported in humans, and therefore the intended role of levamisole in street cocaine remains an enigma.

Clinical characteristics of mephedrone toxicity reported to the UK National Poisons Information Service

James D, Adams RD, Spears R, Cooper G, Lupton DJ, Thompson JP, Thomas SH. Emerg Med J 2010; online early: PM:20798084:

Objective

To describe the patterns and clinical features of toxicity related to recreational use of mephedrone and other cathinones in the UK using data collected by the National Poisons Information Service (NPIS).

Methods

The number of accesses to TOXBASE, the NPIS online poisons information database, details of consecutive cases uploaded onto TOXBASE and the number and details of telephone enquiries made to the NPIS by health professionals in the UK were collected for the period March 2009-February 2010.

Results

Over the year of study there were 2901 TOXBASE accesses and 188 telephone enquiries relating to cathinones, the majority relating to mephedrone (TOXBASE 1664, telephone 157), with a month-on-month increase in numbers. In 131 telephone enquiries concerning mephedrone, alone or in combination with alcohol, common clinical features reported included agitation or aggression (n=32, 24%, 95% CI 18% to 33%), tachycardia (n=29, 22%, 95% CI 16% to 30%), confusion or psychosis (n=18, 14%, 95% CI 9% to 21%), chest pain (n=17, 13%, 95% CI 8% to 20%), nausea (n=15, 11%, 95% CI 7% to 18%), palpitations (n=14, 11%, 95% CI 6% to 18%), peripheral vasoconstriction (n=10, 8%, 95% CI 4% to 14%) and headache (n=7, 5%, 95% CI 2% to 11%). Convulsions were reported in four cases (3%, 95% CI 1% to 8%). One exposed person died following cardiac arrest (1%, 95% CI 0% to 4%), although subsequent investigation suggested that mephedrone was not responsible.

Conclusions

Toxicity associated with recreational mephedrone use is increasingly common in the UK. Sympathomimetic adverse effects are common and severe effects are also reported. Structured data collected by the NPIS may be of use in identifying trends in poisoning and in establishing toxidromes for new drugs of abuse.

Impact of supervision of methadone consumption on deaths related to methadone overdose (1993-2008): analyses using OD4 index in England and Scotland

Strang J, Hall W, Hickman M, Bird SM. Br Med J 2010; 341: c4851.

Objective

To evaluate the impact of introduction of supervision of methadone dosing on deaths related to overdose of methadone in Scotland and England between 1993 and 2008 while controlling for increased prescribing of methadone.

Design

Analysis of annual trends in deaths related to overdose of methadone in relation to defined daily doses of methadone prescribed.

Setting

Scotland and England.

Population

Deaths in which methadone was coded as the only drug involved or as one of the drugs implicated.

Main outcome measure

Annual OD4-methadone index (number of deaths with methadone implicated per million defined daily doses of methadone prescribed in that year).

Results

OD4-methadone declined substantially over the four epochs of four years between 1993 and 2008. It decreased significantly ($P < 0.05$) in 10 of 12 epoch changes: in Scotland from 19.3 (95% confidence interval 15-24) to 4.1 (2.8-5.4) and finally to 3.0 (2.4-3.5) for methadone only deaths (and from 58 to 29 to 14 for deaths with any mention of methadone); in England from 27.1 (25-29) to 24.8 (23-27) and finally to 5.8 (5.3-6.3) for methadone only deaths (and from 46 to 42 to 12 for deaths with any mention of methadone). The decreases in OD4-methadone were closely related to the introduction of supervised dosing of methadone in both countries, first in Scotland (1995-2000) and later in England (1999-2005). These declines occurred over periods of substantial increases in prescribing of methadone (18-fold increase in defined daily doses per million population annually in Scotland and sevenfold increase in England).

Conclusions

Introduction of supervised methadone dosing was followed by substantial declines in deaths related to overdose of methadone in both Scotland and England. OD4-methadone index analyses, controlled for substantial increases in methadone prescribing in both countries, identified at least a fourfold reduction in deaths due to methadone related overdose per defined daily dose (OD4-methadone) over this period.

Twenty-three deaths with γ -hydroxybutyrate overdose in western Sweden between 2000 and 2007

Knudsen K, Jonsson U, Abrahamsson J. Acta Anaesthesiol Scand 2010; 54: 987-92.

Background

γ -Hydroxybutyrate (GHB) is a drug of abuse with a status as being safe. In spite of a reputation of low toxicity, a huge number of deaths associated with this drug have been recorded during recent years in Sweden. It is unclear whether coingestion with other drugs or ethanol causes death in GHB overdoses or whether GHB itself is the main cause of death.

Objectives

The aim of this study was to analyze the cause of death in GHB-related fatalities seen in our region.

Methods

All cases of deaths with GHB during the year 2000-2007 in the region of western Sweden were studied retrospectively. The cases were classified as either GHB poisonings without any, with a minor or a major influence of other drugs on the cause of death.

Results

Twenty-three cases were diagnosed as deaths due to GHB overdose. Ninety-one percent coingested other substances. Ninety-one percent of the decedents were male. Age varied between 16 and 46, with the median age at 25 years. Forty-three percent of the cases were classified as GHB poisonings without any or a minor influence of other drugs on the cause of death. Thirty percent also ingested ethanol. Two patients (9%) were only intoxicated with GHB.

Conclusions

Intoxication with GHB carries some mortality. Combining GHB with ethanol does not explain the many deaths in our region, nor do extremely high plasma concentrations of GHB. The intake of opioids increases the toxicity of GHB. The drug itself has such biological activities that an overdose is dangerous and may lead to death.

Plasma glucose, lactate, sodium, and potassium levels in children hospitalized with acute alcohol intoxication

Tonisson M, Tillmann V, Kuudeberg A, Vali M. Alcohol 2010; 44: 565-71.

Abstract

The aim of our research was to study prevalence of changes in plasma levels of lactate, potassium, glucose, and sodium in relation to alcohol concentration in children hospitalized with acute alcohol intoxication (AAI).

Data from 194 under 18-year-old children hospitalized to the two only children's hospital in Estonia over a 2-year period were analyzed. The pediatrician on call filled in a special form on the clinical symptoms of AAI; a blood sample was drawn for biochemical tests, and a urine sample taken to exclude narcotic intoxication.

The most common finding was hyperlactinemia occurring in 66% of the patients (n=128) followed by hypokalemia (<3.5 mmol/L) in 50% (n=97), and glucose above of reference value (>6.1 mmol/L) in 40.2% of the children (n=78). Hyponatremia was present in five children.

In conclusion, hyperlactinemia, hypokalemia, and glucose levels above of reference value are common biochemical findings in children hospitalized with acute AAI.

The value of initial lactate in patients with carbon monoxide intoxication: in the emergency department

Moon JM, Shin MH, Chun BJ. Hum Exp Toxicol 2010; online early: doi: 10.1177/0960327110384527:

Abstract

Patients with carbon monoxide (CO) poisoning have been found to have a correlation between initial clinical severity on admission and blood lactate levels. Recently, it is suggested that the lactate level may be a useful prognostic factor in cases study.

The purpose of this study was to determine whether lactate levels were associated with the short-term outcome of patients with CO poisoning and identify the characteristics of patients with high initial lactate levels. Eighty patients that presented to the Chonnam National University Hospital after CO poisoning, over 5 years, were enrolled in this retrospective study.

Fifty-six (70.0%) patients had high lactate (>2.1 mmol/L) on admission. Thirty-three (41.3%) patients had medical complications and one patient (1.3%) died. The patients with high initial lactate had an altered mental status more frequently, higher WBC, glucose and carboxyhemoglobin (COHb), and lower base deficit on admission. The multivariate analysis showed that lactate was an independent factor associated with serious complications and the need for intensive medical treatment, along with advanced age, WBC, and altered mental status on admission.

The results of this study show that the initial lactate was useful for patient prognosis after CO poisoning.

Household cleaning product-related injuries treated in US emergency departments in 1990-2006

McKenzie LB, Ahir N, Stolz U, Nelson NG. Pediatrics 2010; 126: 509-16.

Objective

The goal was to examine comprehensively the patterns and trends of household cleaning product-related injuries among children treated in US emergency departments.

Methods

Through use of the National Electronic Injury Surveillance System database, cases of unintentional, nonfatal, household cleaning product-related injuries were selected by using product codes for drain cleaners, ammonia, metal polishes/tarnish removers, turpentine, dishwasher

detergents, acids, swimming pool chemicals, oven cleaners, pine oil cleaners/disinfectants, laundry soaps/detergents, toilet bowl products, abrasive cleaners, general-purpose household cleaners, noncosmetic bleaches, windshield wiper fluids, caustic agents, lye, wallpaper cleaners, room deodorizers/fresheners, spot removers, and dishwashing liquids. Products were categorized according to major toxic ingredients, mode of action, and exposure.

Results

An estimated 267 269 children ≤ 5 years of age were treated in US emergency departments for household cleaning product-related injuries. The number of injuries attributable to household cleaning product exposure decreased 46.0% from 22 141 in 1990 to 11 964 in 2006. The product most-commonly associated with injury was bleach (37.1%). Children 1-3 years of age accounted for 72.0% of cases. The primary mechanism of injury was ingestion (62.7%). The most common source or container was spray-bottles (40.1%). Although rates of household cleaner-related injuries from regular bottles or original containers and kitchenware decreased during the study period, spray-bottle injury rates showed no decrease.

Conclusion

Although national rates of household cleaning product-related injuries in children decreased significantly over time, the number of injuries remains high.

Low-level hydrogen sulfide and central nervous system dysfunction

Kilburn KH, Thrasher JD, Gray MR. *Toxicol Ind Health* 2010; 26: 387-405.

Abstract

Forty-nine adults living in Lovington, Tatum, and Artesia, the sour gas/oil sector of Southeastern New Mexico, were tested for neurobehavioral impairment.

Contributing hydrogen sulfide were (1) an anaerobic sewage plant; (2) two oil refineries; (3) natural gas/oil wells and (4) a cheese-manufacturing plant and its waste lagoons. Comparisons were to unexposed Wickenburg, Arizona, adults.

Neurobehavioral functions were measured in 26 Lovington adults including 23 people from Tatum and Artesia, New Mexico, and 42 unexposed Arizona people. Participants completed questionnaires including chemical exposures, symptom frequencies and the Profile of Mood States. Measurements included balance, reaction time, color discrimination, blink reflex, visual fields, grip strength, hearing, vibration, problem solving, verbal recall, long-term memory, peg placement, trail making and fingertip number writing errors (FTNWE). Average numbers of abnormalities and test scores were adjusted for age, gender, educational level, height and weight, expressed as percent predicted (% pred) and compared by analysis of variance (ANOVA). Ages and educational attainment of the three groups were not statistically significantly different (ssd).

Mean values of Lovington residents were ssd from the unexposed Arizona people for simple and choice reaction times, balance with eyes open and closed, visual field score, hearing and grip strength. Culture Fair, digit symbol substitution, vocabulary, verbal recall, peg placement, trail making A and B, FTNWE, information, picture completion and similarities were also ssd. The Lovington adults who averaged 11.8 abnormalities were ssd from, Tatum-Artesia adults who had 3.6 and from unexposed subjects with 2.0.

Multiple source community hydrogen sulfide exposures impaired neurobehavioral functions.

Renal impairment caused by chronic occupational chromate exposure

Wang T, Jia G, Zhang J, Ma Y, Feng W, Liu L, Zhang N, Yan L, Wang X, Zhang X, Liu Z, Du X, Zhen S. *Int Arch Occup Environ Health* 2010; online early: PM:20717692:

Purpose

To determine the nephritic toxicity of chromate after chronic occupational exposure.

Methods

The environmental contamination was assessed by measuring the chromium (Cr) in 8-h airborne sampler. The integrated level of Cr was determined by Cr concentrations in the whole blood (WB-Cr) and the urine (U-Cr). The renal glomerular and tubule impairment was evaluated by determination of cystatin C (Cys-C) in the serum and microalbumin (mALB), urinary β_2 -microglobulin (β_2 M), N-acetyl-beta-D: -glucosaminidase (NAG) activity in the urine.

Results

The mean occupational exposure time to Cr was 12.86 years with average daily air level of 27.13 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ comparing to 0.11 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of the background level. The WB-Cr and U-Cr were 23.49 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$ and 17.41 $\mu\text{g}/\text{g}$ creatinine (Cre), respectively in the chromate-exposed workers comparing to 3.32 $\mu\text{g}/\text{L}$ and 1.52 $\mu\text{g}/\text{g}$ Cre in the controls. The serum Cys-C and urinary mALB were significantly increased in the chromate-exposed workers. Exposure to Cr seems to induce an enhanced level of urinary NAG activity and β_2 M concentration. The increased serum Cys-C concentration was positively correlated with the level of serum Cre. The U-Cr was positively correlated to the concentrations of urinary mALB, β_2 M, and the activity of NAG.

Conclusions

Chronic occupational exposure to chromate causes comprehensive renal impairment though more severity could occur in the tubule than in the glomerular.

Maternal low-level lead exposure and fetal growth

Zhu M, Fitzgerald EF, Gelberg KH, Lin S, Druschel CM. *Environ Health Perspect* 2010; 118: 1471-5.

Background

Limited epidemiologic studies have examined the association between maternal low-level lead exposure [blood lead (PbB) $\leq 10 \mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$] and fetal growth.

Objective

We examined whether maternal low-level lead exposure is associated with decreased fetal growth.

Methods

We linked New York State Heavy Metals Registry records of women who had PbB measurements with birth certificates to identify 43288 mother-infant pairs in upstate New York in a retrospective cohort study from 2003 through 2005. We used multiple linear regression with fractional polynomials and logistic regression to relate birth weight, preterm delivery, and small for gestational age to PbB levels, adjusting for potential confounders. We used a closed-test procedure to identify the best fractional polynomials for PbB among 44 combinations.

Results

We found a statistically significant association between PbB (square root transformed) and birth weight. Relative to 0 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$, PbBs of 5 and 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ were associated with an average of 61 g and 87 g decrease in birth weight, respectively. The adjusted odds ratio for PbBs between 3.1 and 9.9 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ (highest quartile) was 1.04 [95% confidence interval (CI), 0.89-1.22] for preterm delivery and 1.07 (95% CI, 0.93-1.23) for small for gestational age, relative to PbBs 1 $\mu\text{g}/\text{dL}$ (lowest quartile). No clear dose-response trends were evident when all of the quartiles were assessed.

Conclusions

Low-level PbB was associated with a small risk of decreased birth weight with a supralinear dose-response relationship, but was not related to preterm birth or small for gestational age. The results have important implications regarding maternal PbB.

Mustard gas toxicity: the acute and chronic pathological effects

Ghabili K, Agutter PS, Ghanei M, Ansarin K, Shoja MM. *J Appl Toxicol* 2010; online early: doi: 10.1002/jat.1581:

Abstract

Ever since it was first used in armed conflict, mustard gas (sulfur mustard, MG) has been known to

cause a wide range of acute and chronic injuries to exposure victims. The earliest descriptions of these injuries were published during and in the immediate aftermath of the First World War, and a further series of accounts followed the Second World War.

More recently, MG has been deployed in warfare in the Middle East and this resulted in large numbers of victims, whose conditions have been studied in detail at hospitals in the region. In this review, we bring together the older and more recent clinical studies on MG toxicity and summarize what is now known about the acute and chronic effects of the agent on the eyes, skin, respiratory tract and other physiological systems.

In the majority of patients, the most clinically serious long-term consequences of MG poisoning are on the respiratory system, but the effects on the skin and other systems also have a significant impact on quality of life. Aspects of the management of these patients are discussed.

Predicting acute complicated glyphosate intoxication in the emergency department

Moon JM, Chun BJ. Clin Toxicol 2010; 48: 718-24.

Background

Glyphosate herbicide intoxication results in a range of mortality and morbidity, depending on patients' factors. Predicting which patient will need intensive medical treatment might help reduce mortality by providing prompt treatment, as well as triage those patients not likely to develop complications. Thus, we sought to identify independent factors that could predict which patient will develop subsequent medical complications.

Methods

Seventy-six patients presenting with acute glyphosate herbicide ingestion at Chonnam National University Hospital were enrolled in this retrospective study. To identify the predictive factors for complications, objective variables easily assessed at presentation including previously reported predictive factors for mortality, such as age, vital signs, X-ray abnormalities, and laboratory findings, were analyzed by univariate and multivariate stepwise logistic regression analyses.

Results

Of the 76 patients, 32 (42.1%) had medical complications and 2 (2.6%) died. Metabolic acidosis was the most common medical complication. Whereas metabolic acidosis, respiratory failure, hypotension, acute kidney injury, hyperkalemia, and seizures developed within 24 h, acute pancreatitis occurred a few days after the ingestion. The univariate analysis showed that an advanced age, amount ingested >100 mL, X-ray abnormalities, elevated amylase, alanine aminotransferase (ALT), and blood nitrogen urea were significant factors. However, the multivariate analysis showed that advanced age, elevated ALT, and X-ray abnormalities were independent factors associated with serious complications and the need for intensive medical treatment.

Conclusions

The results of this study showed that age > 50 years, X-ray abnormalities, and ALT > 40 U/L were significant predictive factors for complications in patients with glyphosate surfactant herbicide poisoning; patients with these findings might require admission to the intensive care unit.

Assessment of neuromuscular dysfunction during poisoning by organophosphorus compounds

Thiermann H, Seeger T, Gonder S, Herkert N, Antkowiak B, Zilker T, Eyer F, Worek F. Chem Biol Interact 2010; 187: 265-9.

Abstract

Dysfunction of respiratory muscles is a life-threatening complication in poisoning by organophosphorus compounds (OPs). It is both of central and peripheral origin due to impaired cholinergic signalling upon inhibition of acetylcholinesterase (AChE). The dysfunction at neuromuscular synapses is not amenable to anticholinergics and remains a therapeutic challenge. Thus, a clear

understanding of the distinct mechanisms occurring at neuromuscular synapses is decisive for the development and improvement of therapeutic strategies, particularly with nerve agent poisoning, where clinical studies are prevented by ethical considerations.

Using red blood cell AChE, the kinetics of OP induced inhibition, aging, and spontaneous and oxime-induced reactivation have been elucidated. In a dynamically working in vitro model with real-time determination of membrane-bound AChE, it was shown that the kinetic constants derived from erythrocyte AChE are comparable to muscle AChE in a given species. To assess, whether kinetic considerations of AChE activity are relevant for the neuromuscular function, organotypic spinal cord-skeletal muscle cocultures have been established.

In this model neostigmine and VX affected neuromuscular transmission as anticipated from their known actions on AChE. Also oxime-induced restoration of the neuromuscular transmission was observed. These findings were confirmed by functional studies on diaphragm muscles of various species with determination of muscle force generation upon phrenic nerve or indirect electrical field stimulation techniques. Investigations with human intercostal muscles are in progress to assess the conditions in human tissue. The results obtained with paraoxon favourably correlate with data from clinical findings of parathion-poisoned patients where the correlation of neuromuscular transmission with the activity of erythrocyte AChE could be established.

In conclusion, a variety of methods are available to follow the microscopic reactions occurring at the synaptic level. Due to the lack of clinical data with different OPs, e.g. nerve agents, well designed animal experiments, reflecting the human situation as close as possible, are indispensable for the development of new drugs against the deleterious OP effects.

Paradox findings may challenge orthodox reasoning in acute organophosphate poisoning

Eyer P, Worek F, Thiermann H, Eddleston M. *Chem Biol Interact* 2010; 187: 270-8.

Abstract

It is generally accepted that inhibition of acetylcholinesterase (AChE) is the most important acute toxic action of organophosphorus compounds, leading to accumulation of acetylcholine followed by a dysfunction of cholinergic signaling. However, the degree of AChE inhibition is not uniformly correlated with cholinergic dysfunction, probably because the excess of essential AChE varies among tissues. Moreover, the cholinergic system shows remarkable plasticity, allowing modulations to compensate for dysfunctions of the canonical pathway. A prominent example is the living (-/-) AChE knockout mouse.

Clinical experience indicates that precipitous inhibition of AChE leads to more severe poisoning than more protracted yet finally complete inhibition. The former situation is seen in parathion, the latter in oxydemeton methyl poisoning. At first glance, this dichotomy is surprising since parathion is a pro-poison and has to be activated to the oxon, while the latter is still the ultimate inhibitor. Also oxime therapy in organophosphorus poisoning apparently gives perplexing results: oximes are usually able to reactivate diethylphosphorylated AChE, but the efficiency may be occasionally markedly smaller than expected from kinetic data. Dimethylphosphorylated AChE is in general less amenable to oxime therapy, which largely fails in some cases of dimethoate poisoning where aging was much faster than expected from a dimethylphosphorylated enzyme. Similarly, poisoning by profenofos, an O,S-dialkyl phosphate, leads to a rapidly aged enzyme. Most surprisingly, these patients were usually well on admission, yet their erythrocyte AChE was completely inhibited.

Analysis of the kinetic constants of the most important reaction pathways, determination of the reactant concentrations in vivo and comparison with computer simulations may reveal unexpected toxic reactions. Pertinent examples will be presented and the potentially underlying phenomena discussed.

Management of phosgene-induced acute lung injury

Grainge C, Rice P. *Clin Toxicol* 2010; 48: 497-508.

Context

Phosgene is a substance of immense importance in the chemical industry. Because of its widespread industrial use, there is potential for small-scale exposures within the workplace, large-scale accidental release, or even deliberate release into a built-up area.

Objective

This review aims to examine all published studies concerning potential treatments for phosgene-induced acute lung injury and incorporate them into up-to-date clinical guidance. In addition, it aims to contrast the approaches when dealing with small numbers of patients known to be exposed (possibly with dose information) with the presentation of a large and heterogeneous population of casualties following a significant industrial accident or deliberate release; no published guidelines have specifically addressed this second problem.

Methods

PubMed and Embase were searched for all available years till April 2010 and 584 papers were identified and considered.

Experimental studies

Because of the nature of the injury, there have been no human trials of patients exposed to phosgene. Multiple small and large animal studies have been performed to examine potential treatments of phosgene-induced acute lung injury, but many of these used isolated organ models, pretreatment regimens, or clinically improbable doses. Recent studies in large animals using both realistic time frames and dosing regimens have improved our knowledge, but clinical guidance remains based on incomplete data.

Management of a small-scale, confirmed exposure

In the circumstance of a small-scale, confirmed industrial release where a few individuals are exposed and present rapidly, an intravenous bolus of high-dose corticosteroid (e.g., methylprednisolone 1 g) should be considered, although there are no experimental data to support this recommendation. The evidence is that there is no benefit from nebulized steroid even when administered 1 h after exposure, or methylprednisolone if administered intravenously ≥ 6 h after exposure. Consideration should also be given to administration of nebulized acetylcysteine 1-2 g, though there is no substantive evidence of benefit outside a small animal, isolated lung model and there is a possibility of adverse effects. If the oxygen saturation falls below 94%, patients should receive the lowest concentration of supplemental oxygen to maintain their SaO₂ in the normal range. Once patients require oxygen, nebulized β -agonists [e.g., salbutamol (albuterol) 5 mg by nebulizer every 4 h] may reduce lung inflammation if administered within 1 h of exposure. Elective intubation should be considered early using an ARDSnet protective ventilation strategy.

Management of a large-scale, non-confirmed exposure

In the circumstances of a large-scale industrial or urban release, not all patients presenting will have been exposed and health services are likely to be highly stretched. In this situation, patients should not be treated immediately as there is no evidence that delaying therapy causes harm, rather they should be rested and observed with regular physical examination and measurement of peripheral oxygen saturations. Once a patient's oxygen saturation falls below 94%, treatment with the lowest concentration of oxygen required to maintain their oxygen saturations in the normal range should be started. Once oxygen has been started, nebulized β -agonists [e.g., salbutamol (albuterol) 5 mg by nebulizer every 4 h] may reduce lung inflammation if administered within 1 h of exposure, though delayed administration which is likely following a large-scale release has not been tested formally. There is no benefit from nebulized steroid even when administered 1 h after exposure, or high-dose corticosteroid if administered intravenously ≥ 6 h after exposure. Although there are no experimental data to support this recommendation, an intravenous bolus of high-dose corticosteroid (e.g., methylprednisolone 1 g) may be considered if presentation is < 6 h and resources allow. Depending on the numbers of casualties presenting, invasive ventilation should be initiated either electively once symptoms present (especially where there is a short latent period,

indicating likelihood of more significant injury), or delayed until required. Ventilation should be with high positive end expiratory pressure, ARDSnet recommended ventilation.

Conclusions

The mechanisms underlying the phosgene-induced acute lung injury are not well understood. Future experimental work should ensure that potential treatments are tested in a large animal model using realistic dosing regimens and clinically relevant timings, such as those that might be found in a mass casualty situation.

Late hematologic toxicity following treatment of rattlesnake envenomation with crotalidae polyvalent immune Fab antivenom

Ruha AM, Curry SC, Albrecht C, Riley B, Pizon A. *Toxicon* 2010; online early: doi:10.1016/j.toxicon.2010.09.014:

Background

North American rattlesnake envenomations commonly produce defibrination, coagulopathy and/or thrombocytopenia, which may be reversed following treatment with Crotalidae Polyvalent Immune Fab Ovine (FabAV). Despite initial resolution with FabAV, late onset or recurrence of venom-induced hematologic effects may occur. Time at which onset of late hematotoxicity may first be detected is unknown. The purpose of this study was to identify the incidence and time of onset of recurrent or new late hypofibrinogenemia, coagulopathy, or thrombocytopenia in a cohort of rattlesnake envenomation patients seen in outpatient follow-up after treatment with FabAV, and to report hematologic outcomes in these patients.

Methods

Review of 66 charts of patients with rattlesnake envenomation who were treated with FabAV, and subsequently had outpatient follow-up evaluation at least 48 h after last FabAV, was performed. Demographic information, rattlesnake and bite characteristics, dose and timing of antivenom administration, adverse events, in-patient laboratory values, length of hospital stay, and follow-up laboratory values were collected. The primary outcome parameters were recurrent or delayed onset coagulopathy, hypofibrinogenemia, or thrombocytopenia identified no sooner than 48 h after last dose of FabAV.

Results

Prior to control of the envenomation with FabAV, 42 patients (63.6%) experienced hematologic toxicity. At follow-up, 21 patients (32%) were found to have late coagulopathy, hypofibrinogenemia, or thrombocytopenia. Of twenty-three patients (35%) with more than one follow-up visit, fifteen had normal laboratory findings at the first follow-up visit. Five of these 15 patients (8% of total study group; 33% of this subgroup) with normal hematologic studies at first follow-up exhibited late hematologic toxicity at second follow-up. Severe late hematologic toxicity developed in five of 66 (8%) patients. One patient was retreated with FabAV for late severe thrombocytopenia.

Conclusion

Recurrent and delayed onset of hematologic toxicity in rattlesnake envenomation victims treated with FabAV is common. Follow-up more than three days after treatment is necessary to detect all cases of late hematologic toxicity.

Recurrent coagulopathy and thrombocytopenia in children treated with crotalidae polyvalent immune Fab: a case series

Miller AD, Young MC, DeMott MC, Ly BT, Clark RF. *Pediatr Emerg Care* 2010; 26: 576-82.

Objectives

Recurrent signs and symptoms after initial treatment and control of coagulopathy and thrombocytopenia after American pit viper (crotaline) envenomations have been previously described in patients treated with Crotalidae polyvalent immune Fab antivenom (FabAV). The

significance and necessity of treatment of these recurrent abnormalities are uncertain. Our goal was to further characterize recurrent coagulopathy or thrombocytopenia in pediatric patients.

Methods

All cases presenting to our Toxicology Consult Service, which covers 6 hospitals in a metropolitan area, from May 2007 to April 2008 with recurrent coagulopathy after initial control with FabAV were included and retrospectively reviewed.

Results

Four cases of pediatric patients are presented who presented with recurrent coagulopathy and/or thrombocytopenia after initial control with FabAV. The patients were all treated with delayed administration of FabAV with variable results. Blood products administered without concurrent FabAV were of limited use. The laboratory abnormalities took up to 18 days to resolve in one case. One patient developed hemodynamically significant spontaneous bleeding.

Conclusions

The cases presented here suggest administration of FabAV may correct delayed coagulopathy associated with crotaline envenomations. The first 3 cases illustrate that in the face of severe derangements in laboratory values, most envenomated patients treated with FabAV do not develop significant bleeding. These cases may respond to additional antivenom alone. However, case 4 illustrates that hemodynamically significant spontaneous bleeding can occur. Until more data are available, readministration of FabAV is a reasonable first-line therapy for delayed coagulopathy associated with crotaline envenomations.

Antivenin remains effective against African *Viperidae* bites despite a delayed treatment

Larréché S, Mion G, Mayet A, Verret C, Puidupin M, Benois A, Petitjeans F, Libert N, Goyffon M. Am J Emerg Med 2010; online early: doi: 10.1016/j.ajem.2009.08.022:

Background

Viperidae bites represent a public health issue in Africa and are responsible for a hemorrhagic syndrome with fatal outcome in the short term. A research on Medline database does not reveal any data definitively demonstrating the efficiency of antivenom in case of delayed administration. The aim of this study, based on a 12-year survey of viperine syndromes in Republic of Djibouti, was to compare the normalization of the hemostasis disorders with an early administration of antivenin versus a delayed administration.

Methods

A retrospective study was conducted from October 1994 to May 2006 in the intensive care unit of the French military Hospital, in Djibouti. Seventy-three Viperidae-envenomed patients were included. Antivenin efficiency in correcting hemostatic disorders was analyzed in relation to time to treatment (before or after the 24th hour after the bite).

Results

Forty-two patients (58%) presented with bleeding. A consumptive coagulopathy was found in 68 patients (93%). Antivenin was observed to be effective in improving hemostasis, and the time to normalization of biologic parameters was similar, whether the treatment was started before or after the 24th hour after the bite.

Conclusion

Antivenin should ideally be administered as early as possible. However, in Africa, time to treatment generally exceeds 24 hours. The results of the present evidence-based study confirm an empirical concept: a delayed time to treatment should in no way contraindicate the use of antivenin immunotherapy, in the case of African Viperidae bites.

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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 Health Protection Agency.

