Letter to the Editor

Malignant Hypertension in a Woman with Previous Chronic Lithium Nephrotoxicity

R.R. Ross R. Bailey
C.P. Charles P. Swainson
K.L. Kelvin L. Lynn
R.J. Robert J. Walker

Department of Nephrology, Christchurch Hospital, Christchurch, New Zealand

Ross R. Bailey, MD, Department of Nephrology, Christchurch Hospital, Private Bag, Christchurch (New Zealand)

Dear Sir,

Lithium carbonate causes a variety of renal disorders [1–3]. In 1979, we investigated a 31-year-old woman with a 10-year history of a manic-depressive psychosis. For 6 years she had been treated with lithium carbonate which had been stopped 10 weeks before presentation because of renal insufficiency. She had been troubled by polyuria and polydipsia for 4 years. Plasma lithium concentrations had been between 1.0 and 1.75 mmol/l. 1 month prior to presentation, she had suffered her third grand mal epileptic fit and had been commenced on phenytoin. The blood pressure was consistently about 136/86 mm Hg.

Investigations: An MSU contained no cells or casts and was sterile on culture, the plasma creatinine was 0.16 mmol/l, creatinine clearance 0.78 ml/s, 51Cr-EDTA clearance 0.73 ml/s, 24-hour urinary protein excretion less than 0.1 g and maximal urinary concentrating ability (following intranasal desmopressin) 304 mmol/kg. Renal biopsy showed a severe chronic interstitial nephritis with features closely resembling those reported by Hest-bech et al. [2]. 9 months later, the blood pressure was 138/98 mm Hg, the plasma creatinine 0.13 mmol/l, creatinine clearance 0.88 ml/s, 24-hour protein excretion 0.33 g and maximal urinary concentrating ability 301 mmol/kg.

4 years later, she presented with a 3-month deterioration in health including severe frontal headaches, chest pain and dyspnoea. She had been taking phenytoin, but no other medications. The blood pressure was 220/136 mm Hg and the fundi showed hemorrhages, exudates and papilledema. Left ventricular enlargement was present on chest X-ray and an electrocardiogram showed left ventricular hypertrophy and ischemic changes. The plasma creatinine was 0.14 mmol/l, creatinine clearance 0.6 ml/s, 51Cr-EDTA clearance 0.71 ml/s, mean 24-hour urinary protein excretion 0.7 g and maximal urinary concentrating ability 275 mmol/kg. A renal angiogram was normal. Plasma renin activity was 34.7 nmol/l/h (normal 0.15–1.55), plasma aldosterone 3,107 pmol/l (normal 140–550), plasma norepinephrine 946 pg/ml and plasma epinephrine 69 pg/ml (both within normal range). A renal biopsy again showed a chronic interstitial nephritis, but there were also severe hypertensive vascular changes. The patient’s blood pressure was controlled with frusemide and captopril.
A variety of renal disorders has been reported in patients taking lithium carbonate [1–3], the most serious of which is a chronic interstitial nephritis [2]. We are unaware of any reports of malignant hypertension developing in a patient with the latter complication.

References