Vascular Injury in Acute Renal Failure due to Leptospirosis Is Not Associated with Antineutrophil Cytoplasnic Antibody

R. Abdulkader
E. Sabbaga
L. Meireles
A. Raduc

Nephrology Division, Infectious Diseases Department and Rheumatology Division, Faculdade de Medicina de Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil

Regina Abdulkader, Faculdade de Medicina da USP, Av. Dr. Arnaldo, 455, 3° andar, sala 67, 01246-903 São Paulo, SP (Brazil)

Dear Sir,

Antineutrophil cytoplasmic antibodies (ANCA) are markers of various vasculitic syndromes. The clinical spectrum of ANCA-associated diseases ranges from renal limited forms to systemic vasculitis affecting multiple organs like Wegener’s granulomatosis and microscopic polyarteritis [1]. Some authors [2] have suggested that ANCA might play a pathogenic role in these diseases, but seasonal variation in the onset and the flu-like prodrome suggest that infectious agents could also be important in the etiopathogenic mechanisms. ANCA was first described in arbovirus-associated vasculitis [3], but, as far as we know, no other research was done on ANCA related to infectious vasculitis.

Leptospirosis, when occurring as Weil’s syndrome, is a systemic vasculitis characterized by the injury of the endothelium of capillaries, as well as arteritis involving medium and large arteries [4]. The mechanisms of vascular damage are not completely known. The most widely accepted theory is a toxin-induced lesion [4, 5], but an immunologic mechanism is also proposed [6]. If an immunologic mechanism is involved in leptospirosis vasculitis, it could be due to ANCA association.

Thus, we studied 10 patients with leptospirosis (Weil’s syndrome) characterized by acute renal failure [plasma creatinine > 180 µmol/l (2.0 mg/dl)], jaundice [total serum bilirubin > 17 µmol/l (1.0 mg/dl)] and thrombocytopenia (platelet count < 150 · 10^9/l). The diagnosis was confirmed by epidemiologic data and a positive agglutination test to Leptospira interrogans (titer > 1:1,600).

Patients were 9 men and 1 woman, aged 15-38 years (31 ± 7 years). Eight to twenty days (12 ± 5 days) after leptospirosis symptoms (fever and myalgia) had begun, a blood sample was collected for ANCA determination. ANCA was determined by indirect immunofluorescence microscopy using alcohol-fixed neutrophils as substrate [1]. Other laboratory data obtained on the same day showed: total serum bilirubin = 376 ± 239 µmol/l (22 ± 14 mg/dl), plasma creatinine = 513 ± 203 µmol/l (5.8 ± 2.3 mg/dl) and platelet count = 76.8 ± 44.1 · 10^9/l.

Although all patients had severe disease none showed positive ANCA.
ANCA-associated vasculitis usually begins after a flu-like prodrome and has a seasonal incidence [2]. These factors suggest an infectious agent involved in its pathogenesis. In leptospirosis vasculitis mechanisms other than ANCA must be involved. Maybe viral, but not spirochetal, agents could promote ANCA-induced neutrophil activation with resultant vascular injury [2].

In leptospirosis the present results suggest that vascular injury might be due to direct toxin effect or another immunological factor but not ANCA.

References