**M. Ivanova and R. Stoilov.** CLINICAL MEASUREMENTS USED FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF ANKYLOSING SPONDYLITIS

**Summary.** Ankylosing spondylitis (AS) is a chronic inflammatory rheumatic condition affecting the sacroiliac joints, the spinal column to a varying degree, and to a smaller extent the peripheral joints. At least one third of patients with AS carry a heavy burden of disease that leads to severe disability. Limitation of spinal movement is an early feature of AS and its importance as a clinical sign is emphasized by its inclusion in the New York diagnostic criteria. Methods of determining disease progression and its functional consequences include sequential assessment of spinal mobility. Serial measurements of spinal movement also provide improved evaluation during antirheumatic drug research. Historically up to 20 separate measurements have been used in the assessment of spinal movement. Jenkinson et al. determined 5 standardized measurements that assess accurately the axial status (i. e., cervical, dorsal and lumbar spine, hips and pelvic soft tissue), and derived from it a metrology index BASMI. It is an accurate reflection of axial status. This metrology score is quick, valid, reliable, reproducible and sensitive to change across the disease spectrum.

**Key words:** ankylosing spondylitis, clinical measurements, BASMI

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**D. Karastatev.** SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS ACCELERATED ATHEROSCLEROSIS, CARDIOVASCULAR RISK – IS THERE ANY POSSIBILITY FOR PREVENTIVE STRATEGY

**Summary.** This survey reveals the main reasons for increased cardiovascular risk and arterial thromboembolism in SLE patients. It covers also most of the non-clasical risk factors for accelerated atherosclerosis in SLE. The beneficial usage of statins as preventive treatment is proved for SLE and increased cardio-vascular risk patients. The need for establishment of risk evaluation scale is pointed out according to disease activity, lipid metabolism disturbances, presence of other risk factors and the metabolic effects of the drug therapy.

**Key words:** systemic lupus erythematosus, accelerated atherosclerosis, cardiovascular risk, preventive strategy

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**I. Sheitanov, Tsv. Petranova and Y. Sheitanov.** B-LYMPHOCYTES – A THERAPEUTIC TARGET IN RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS

**Summary.** A considerable amount of cells and inflammation mediators participate in the pathogenesis of rheumatoid arthritis (RA). In last years, the attention is focused on B-lymphocytes. These cells can function as antigen-presenting cells, and can activate the T-lymphocytes. Besides, they produce autoantibodies and cytokines. The mechanisms pointed out confirm the pathogenetic role of B-lymphocytes in RA, thus making them an attractive therapeutic target. Rituximab (MabThera, Rituxan) is a chimeric recombinant monoclonal antibody directed against antigen CD20, expressed on the cell membrane of B-lymphocytes. It is used since 1997 for treatment of CD20-positive B-cell non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma. In last years, its therapeutic effect was established in RA as well. This is shown in a considerable number of studies performed by leading rheumatologists in Europe and USA. In this review, the authors present part of the conclusions of the newest publications. The main consensus recommendations concerning the use of Rituximab in patients with active RA are briefly summarized.

**Key words:** B-lymphocytes, Rituximab, rheumatoid arthritis, therapeutic efficacy

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**D. Dimov.** PREGNANCY AND INFLAMMATORY JOINT DISEASES

**Summary.** During pregnancy in most of the patients with rheumatoid arthritis, juvenile idiopathic arthritis, adult Still’s disease and psoriatic arthritis, the disease symptomatics improves reaching to remission in part of the cases, while in the ankylosing spondylitis patients the state does not change or worsens and more rarely ameliorates. Soon after delivery in most of the patients the disease activity returns or intensifies. It is considered that what lies at the base of this intrapregnancy biphasal shift is the hormonal and neurotransmitter effects on the Th1/Th2 balance in arthritic immunopathogenesis. The pregnancy, delivery, the babies and the postpartum period in the arthritic patients do not differ compared to those in the healthy women. There are data that the incidence of rheumatoid arthritis is decreased during pregnancy and increased in puerperium in comparison with any period of women’s life.
Key words: inflammatory joint diseases, pregnancy, puerperium, review

ORIGINAL ARTICLES

S. Monov and R. Rashkov. AN ALGORITHM FOR THE DIAGNOSIS OF NEUROPSYCHIATRIC SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS

Summary. For the period 1998-2006, clinical, laboratory and instrumental investigations of 225 patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) were carried out. Depending on the peculiarities of the clinical course (with or without involvement of the nervous system – NS), the patients were divided into three groups: with clinically manifested NS injuries, without clinically manifested NS disorders, and patients with incomplete SLE. The results of the investigations showed that the neuropsychiatric impairment was established in a high percent (64.44%) in the patients with SLE. The aim of this study was to elaborate an approach for early detection of NS injuries and diagnosis of neuropsychiatric SLE based on criteria with high sensitivity and specificity.

Key words: systemic lupus erythematosus, neuropsychiatric disorders

K. Yablanski, Zl. Kolarov, S. Vladeva and V. Yordanova. CHANGES IN COLLAGEN TURNOVER IN SCLERODERMA

Summary. The aim of the study was to evaluate the immunity response to collagen antigen in patients with systemic sclerosis. Twenty six patients aged between 34 and 62 years and 26 healthy persons used as controls were studied by ELISA method. The studying of the humoral immune response by the investigation of type IV anticollagen IgG, IgA and IgM classes showed increase of the serum specific IgG, IgA and IgM levels. The specific anticollagen IgG and IgM antibodies showed a significant positive correlation with the progression of the disease. Systemic sclerosis patients with disease exacerbation had significantly higher levels of circulating type IV collagen-derived peptides compared to the nonactive disease and to the control group.

Key words: systemic sclerosis, type IV collagen, type IV collagen-derived peptides

L. Marinchev, I. Terziev, R. Ivanova and B. Vladimirov. HELICOBACTER PYLORI INFECTION – A RISK FACTOR FOR THE DISEASE ACTIVITY OF RHEUMATOID ARTHRITIS AND SYSTEMIC CONNECTIVE TISSUE DISEASES

Summary. The aim of the study was to assess the role of H. pylori infection for the acivity of rheumatoid arthritis (RA) and systemic connective tissue diseases (SCTD). The study comprised 41 patients with RA and 53 with SCTD (PSS, SS, SLE), 88 were women, 6 – men, of middle age 49.9 ± 12.592 years. Duration of diseases was 3.46 ± 0.935 years. All patients had undergone upper GI endoscopy with histology analysis for H. pylori. The grade of Hp infection was estimated quantitatively by Chan. All Hp positive patients were eradicated by the following drug combination: Klacid – 500 mg twice a day, Amoxicillin – 1000 mg twice a day, Omeprazole – 20 mg twice a day for 7 days. The diagnosis RA, PSS, SS, SLE had been established by ACR (American College of Rheumatology) criteria. The activity of RA was assessed according to the following criteria: morning stiffness (min), intensity of pain (VAS – mm), number of painful and swollen joints, ESR. The patients with RA, positive for Hp were followed up at 3rd, 6-th and 12-th month and compared to Hp negative patients. The activity of SCTDs was assessed by the following criteria: for SLE – SLEDAI (systemic lupus erythematosus disease activity index) – over 3 pts = low/moderate activity, over 12 pts – high activity, for PSS – ANA, ESR, for SS – ANA, ESR, Schirmer test. All patients with SCTD were followed up at 3rd and 6-th month and compared respectively to Hp(−) patients. All RA patients had lower activity after eradication of Hp without changing antirheumatic therapy (p < 0.0001). Comparing to Hp(−) patients, there was a significant higher degree of decreasing of the signs of activity after Hp eradication. Comparing to Hp(−) patients with SCTD, there was not a significant difference in the activity after Hp eradication (p > 0.05). Probably, this is due to different immunological and pathogenic mechanisms in SCTDs in comparison to RA. These data show that Hp infection has influence on the activity and course of RA similarly to any other infection. Eradication of Hp decreases the activity of RA and allows the better antirheumatic treatment.

Key words: H. pylori, rheumatoid arthritis, systemic connective tissue diseases, activity
CASE REPORTS

S. Vladeva, K. Jablanski and I. Sheitanov. MICROALBUMINURIA AS AN INDEX OF NEPHROPATHY IN A PATIENT WITH SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS

Summary. The early detection of kidney involvement in systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is particularly important for the initiation of an adequate treatment. A case of a female patient without manifest clinical and laboratory data for nephropathy, but with positive test for microalbuminuria and microscopy data for kidney damage is described.

Key words: systemic lupus erythematosus, lupus nephropathy, microalbuminuria

DRUG THERAPY

T. Troev and E. Konakchieva. NeOx – BACK TO NATURE

Summary. Results are displayed of a clinical research of the developed new medicine on herbal base – NeOx, offered as oil and cream. The oil is combination of 14 Indian herbs and essential oils. The cream is a combined preparation, consisted of 5 Indian natural components. After the end of the treatment – 10 procedures, the pain disappeared, the edema decreased, the capacity of motion of joints increased. NeOx is one of a few medicines, that combine anaesthetic, antiinflammatory and lymphodrainage effect and good tolerance.

Key words: herbal medicines, rheumatic diseases, NeOx

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