New directions in anticoagulant and antiplatelet treatment

Sir,—Simoons and Deckers comprehensively surveyed the therapeutic potential of inhibiting platelet activation and aggregation (Br Heart J 1995;74:337-40). They did not consider the importance of passivation (inactivation) of platelets once haemostasis or limited thrombosis has occurred. Haemostasis requires platelet activation, adhesion, and aggregation to plug the damaged vessel. This process is often assisted by high shear and involves von Willebrand factor. Once haemostasis is achieved it is self-evident that the intensely activated deposited platelets must be inactivated; otherwise platelet deposition on the haemostatic plug will continue and lead to progressive platelet deposition, namely a platelet thrombus. Thus platelet inactivation or passivation can be clinically as important as the inhibition of activation. The mechanism of inactivation is not fully understood, though in an intravascular system this process involves a variety of antithrombotic agents. In an artificial system a normal person shows “bleeding”, indicating passivation of an haemostatic plug. Others show reproducible and persistent activation of the platelets. It remains to be shown if there is an increased risk of thrombosis in the latter group. This approach deserves further study.

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 Interaction of enalapril and antiplatelet agents on mortality (%) in SOLVD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Prevention</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enalapril</td>
<td>Placebo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA+</td>
<td>(A1) 12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA−</td>
<td>(A2) 17.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

APA, antiplatelet agent.

Is aspirin safe in heart failure? More data

Sir,—We recently reviewed the evidence for an interaction between aspirin and ACE inhibitors on mortality in heart failure. At that time the data from SOLVD (studies of left ventricular dysfunction), the most alarming evidence of an interaction, had been presented but not published. The data have now been published in abstract form (table). The authors suggest that the data support a beneficial effect of aspirin in heart failure, though the administration of aspirin was not randomised. The arguments suggesting the reverse were presented by us in our review.

Careful scrutiny of the SOLVD data suggests that the lowest mortality in both the treatment and prevention arms of SOLVD was among patients taking placebo and aspirin (B1 and D1 in the table). Assertion that aspirin is beneficial, based on these data, would logically lead one to withdraw the ACE inhibitor, at least if it were being given to reduce mortality rather than to improve symptoms. This would be flying in the face of the data from properly constructed randomised controlled trials. If one accepts that enalapril is effective, based on a properly randomised comparison, then it is evident that the addition of aspirin is of little or no benefit in patients with heart failure (comparison of C1 and C2 in table). However, the possible loss of benefit with aspirin (comparison of C1 with D1; P = 0.002) remains worrying. About 12% of patients in the SOLVD prevention trial and 16% in the SOLVD treatment trial were taking warfarin. The higher percentage use in the treatment arm reflects the higher proportion of atrial fibrillation and the likely association between severity of heart failure and use of warfarin. Patients taking warfarin are less likely to receive aspirin. Thus the higher mortality in the aspirin non-users may reflect the fact that they were a sicker population.

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Atrial thrombi occurring during sinus rhythm in cardiac amyloidosis: evidence for atrial electromechanical dissociation

Sir,—Dubrey and colleagues reported on a series of patients with cardiac amyloidosis, atrial thrombi, and evidence of atrial electromechanical dissociation. They suggested that systemic anticoagulation may be indicated when atrial systolic function is impaired. Pliehn et al described a similar case presenting with systemic embolisation and again recommended anticoagulation for atrial failure in amyloidosis.

It is perhaps worth noting that atrial dysfunction may be the first manifestation of previously unrecognized amyloid heart disease and that atrial systolic failure can precede clinically detectable ventricular involvement.

We have reported a case of apparent isolated atrial cardiomyopathy complicated by systemic embolism. Diagnostic evaluation at presentation showed dilated, akinetic atria with normal ventricular function. Endomyocardial, rectal, and skeletal muscle biopsies performed at this time did not show any histological evidence of amyloidosis.

The patient progressed over several years to ventricular dysfunction and died in congestive heart failure. Necropsy was not performed but ventricular biopsies were obtained some months previously during an elective operation to replace the tricuspid valve. These showed systemic amyloidosis.

Cardiac amyloidosis should be considered in the differential diagnosis of patients presenting with atrial systolic failure: systemic anticoagulation seems to be indicated in these cases.

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Atrial thrombi occurring during sinus rhythm in cardiac amyloidosis: evidence for atrial electromechanical dissociation

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