Side effects of amrinone therapy

Sir,

In a recent paper, Wilmshurst and Webb-Peploe¹ wrongly attribute to us the claim that the improvement in left ventricular performance produced by amrinone is predominantly due to its positive inotropic action. This assertion cannot, however, be found in our paper² quoted by Wilmshurst. Indeed, when investigating an agent with both inotropic and vasodilator properties it is extremely difficult to ascertain the relative roles of these two mechanisms in increasing cardiac performance. Thus, we have taken great care in all of our papers²⁻⁵ to state that both actions of amrinone were likely to be implicated in the haemodynamic improvements observed and not to comment any further. This, we think, represents a fair assessment of the situation and the present consensus, given that in contrast to many investigators^{2-6,7} Wilmshurst *et al.*⁸ are the only ones who have failed to observe the positive inotropic action of amrinone.

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This paper was shown to the authors, Dr Wilmshurst and Dr Webb-Peploe, who reply as follows:

Sir,

In the paper by LeJemtel *et al.*¹ the cardiotonic efficacy of amrinone is mentioned in the abstract but vasodilatation is not, the introduction is devoted entirely to the positive inotropic effects of the drug with no mention of vasodilatation, and in the discussion the vasodilator properties are mentioned in only one paragraph, while the effects of the drug on contractility are discussed in five paragraphs. The paragraph summarising the results and conclusions discusses this "cardiotonic agent" without mention of vasodilatation. In the most recent publication by the same authors² they state that "amrinone, a non-glycosidic, nonadrenergic cardiotonic agent, improves ventricular performance and reduces symptoms"; they do not describe amrinone as a vasodilator and cardiotonic agent. We fail therefore to see how we could have misrepresented the message in the paper by LeJemtel *et al.*¹ and would suggest that he has altered his views somewhat since he wrote that paper. LeJemtel's letter suggests that in their paper¹ they showed a positive inotropic effect with amrinone. This is difficult to accept since they did not measure any indices of contractility.

It is true that some of our work³⁻⁶ with amrinone contrasts with that of other workers who have measured contractility indices in patients with heart failure,⁷⁻⁹ but we point out that in each case the studies reported by others were considerably smaller than our own. The total number of observations in these studies⁷⁻⁹ combined was less than that in one of our own studies.⁴ It is interesting that despite small numbers of observations in the studies in question⁷⁻⁹ the authors report a positive inotropic effect in patients with the drug at doses which have little or no inotropic effect in normal animals in which acute heart failure had been induced.¹⁰

In isolated muscle bath experiments using both human⁶ and animal tissues,¹¹ under conditions in which it is possible to measure any direct inotropic

effect since preload and afterload are carefully controlled, there is good evidence that with advancing degrees of chronic cardiac failure amrinone exerts less and less of a positive inotropic effect.

Finally, in none of the papers cited by LeJemtel was a dose response relation established for the positive inotropic effects in man.

We believe that these studies illustrate the dangers of starting out with a preconceived notion of a drug's action and attempting to confirm it using a faulty experimental design.

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