Ischaemic heart disease

Treat a “normal” cholesterol if the patient is at vascular risk ▶ In over 20,000 patients with proven coronary artery disease, other vascular disease or diabetes, simvastatin 40 mg was compared to placebo. Considering that 17% in the placebo were on a statin, and 86% in the treatment arm took the drug, the effect of treatment at five years was a significant reduction in all cause mortality (12.9% vs 14.7%, p = 0.0003). This was due to a highly significant 18% (standard error 5) proportional reduction in the coronary death rate (5.7% vs 6.9%, p = 0.0005). The rates of cerebrovascular accident, non-fatal myocardial infarction, and revascularisation were also reduced. Low density lipoprotein (LDL) was reduced by 1 mmol/l on average, starting from an average of 3.3 mmol/l. The benefits remain for patients with total cholesterol < 5 mmol/l and LDL < 3 mmol/l.


Stopping the CHAOS ▶ Vitamin supplementation does not benefit the heart. The CHAOS study helped the cause of vitamin E, but the heart protection study, with 20,000 participants taking vitamin E + vitamin C + vitamin A, showed no benefits over five years’ follow-up. The same was true of long term follow up data from the physicians health study. The message is stop taking vitamins A, C and E, but not the folate.

Heart failure

BNP for heart failure is like troponin for an ACS ▶ In nearly 1,500 patients in the accident and emergency department waiting for a diagnosis for their breathlessness, the diagnosis was dyspnoea caused by congestive heart failure in 744 patients (47%), dyspnoea due to non-cardiac causes in 72 patients (4%). A history of left ventricular dysfunction (5%), and no finding of congestive heart failure in 770 patients (49%). B type natriuretic peptide (BNP) concentrations by themselves were more accurate than any historical or physical findings or laboratory values in identifying congestive heart failure as the cause of dyspnoea. The diagnostic accuracy of BNP at a cutoff of 100 pg/ml was 83.4%. The negative predictive value of BNP at concentration of less than 50 pg/ml was 96%.


General cardiology

TOE can pick up coronary fistulae ▶ Although magnetic resonance imaging has been advertised as the best way of looking at complex anatomy, transoesophageal echocardiography (TOE) can also be used to assess small structures running unusual courses, such as coronary fistulae. In this study of 21 patients, angiography could not delineate the drainage of four fistulae, which were correctly identified by TOE. Connections from all three coronary arteries were imaged.

Pulmonary hypertension as a super-specialty: Previously, the only treatment for pulmonary hypertension was calcium channel blockade. Now, with proven mortality reduction on epoprostanol, and the trials of bosentan, these authors advocate centralising services.


The side effects of β-blockers are overstated. It is commonly believed that β-blockers cause fatigue, impotence, and depression. In a meta-analysis of 15 trials comparing β-blockers to placebo, there was no indication that these drugs cause depression. There was, however, a small excess of reported symptoms of impotence (one for every 199 patients treated for one year) and fatigue (one for every 57 patients treated for one year).


Images in Cardiology

Acute effects of resynchronisation treatment on functional mitral regurgitation in dilated cardiomyopathy

A 71 year old woman presented with severe shortness of breath (New York Heart Association (NYHA) functional class IV) despite optimised medical treatment (angiotensin converting enzyme inhibitor, β blocker, spironolactone, and digoxin). ECG revealed first degree atrioventricular (AV) block (PR interval 256 ms) and left bundle branch block (QRS duration 190 ms). Two dimensional echocardiography showed severe systolic dysfunction (biplane left ventricular ejection fraction 27%) and moderate to severe mitral regurgitation (upper panel, centre). Coronary artery disease was ruled out by coronary angiography. Cardiac resynchronisation therapy (CRT) was initiated with implantation of a biventricular pacemaker (Contak TR1241, Guidant, St Paul, Minnesota, USA), a right ventricular apical lead, and a left ventricular pacing lead (Guidant 4512) positioned in a posterolateral epicardial vein through the coronary sinus. The AV delay was programmed to 120 ms.

At the three months follow up, echocardiography demonstrated reduced severity of mitral regurgitation (lower panel, centre). Three dimensional transoesophageal echocardiographic reconstruction of the regurgitant jet by colour Doppler during atrial pacing (upper panel, right, and video sequence 1) and during CRT with atrioventricular pacing (lower panel, right, and video sequence 2) documented immediate reduction in severity of mitral regurgitation by CRT.

After an additional three months (six months follow up), the patient improved to NYHA functional class II. Maximal VO2 increased from 729 ml/min (12.1 VO2/kg) to 1161 ml/min (16.6 VO2/kg), plasma noradrenaline (norepinephrine) concentrations decreased from 524 ng/l to 355 ng/l, and end diastolic volume decreased from 222 ml to 163 ml.

This case highlights the potential of CRT to reduce functional mitral regurgitation in dilated cardiomyopathy. The effect is immediate and may contribute to improved exercise capacity and left ventricular reverse remodelling.