Bullous skin eruption associated with carbamazepine overdosage

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Summary

A patient who developed a bullous skin eruption associated with carbamazepine overdosage is described. The authors believe this previously unreported phenomenon to be of clinical importance. Carbamazepine should be considered in the differential diagnosis of drug-induced coma with associated bullous lesions.

KEY WORDS: carbamazepine overdose, bullous skin eruption.

Introduction

Bullous skin lesions have been described in association with barbiturate-induced coma (Beveridge and Lawson, 1965) and also with several other drugs (Anonymous, 1981). The lesions characteristically occur at sites of trauma, and within 24 hr of ingesting the drug (Mandy and Ackerman, 1970). The authors wish to report a case of bullous skin eruption as a result of carbamazepine overdosage.

Case report

A 68-year-old female was brought to the Casualty Department, having been discovered at home in a semi-conscious state. On examination, she was drowsy and disorientated in time and place, her pulse was 90/min and regular, and the blood pressure was 90/70 mmHg. There was generalised increase in tone, and hyper-reflexia with equivocal plantar responses bilaterally. Bullous lesions were present on the dorsal aspects of both feet and over the right lower tibia. Further lesions developed over the left iliac crest and on the lateral aspects of the left breast and left forearm during the subsequent 5 hr. The lesions varied in size from 0·5 cm to 3 cm in diameter, each developing initially as an erythematous patch which progressed within one to 2 hr to form a bulla containing clear fluid and surrounded by a narrow rim of erythema.

Discussion

Carbamazepine is in common usage as an anti-convulsant and in the management of trigeminal neuralgia. Toxic effects in therapeutic dosage are relatively common, and skin reactions, including exfoliative dermatitis, urticaria, Stevens-Johnson syndrome and toxic epidermal necrolysis, are said to occur in 3% of patients (Crill, 1973; Roberts and Marks, 1981). The pattern of reaction occurring in our patient has not, to our knowledge, been previously documented with carbamazepine overdosage, although a bullous skin eruption has been described with imipramine, a chemically related compound,
and occasionally in unconscious states without drug ingestion (Freeman and Raza, 1965). A lupus erythematosus-like phenomenon has been described with therapeutic dosage of carbamazepine (Simpson, 1966) and the relationship of therapy to the serological findings in our patient is not clear. However, before the overdose, our patient had taken very few carbamazepine tablets. We conclude that this patient had subepidermal bullous formation occurring as a result of carbamazepine overdose, the clinical pattern resembling a barbiturate-induced bullous eruption. Carbamazepine should be considered in the differential diagnosis of drug-induced coma with associated bullous lesions.

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References


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