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Mitral valve prolapse – do all patients need an echocardiogram?

Sir,

Mitral valve prolapse (MVP) is one of the commonest cardiac abnormalities and yet confusion still exists as to its diagnostic criteria.¹ The diagnosis can be made by several methods. Clinical criteria include auscultation of midsystolic clicks and late systolic murmurs. Echocardiography has played an increasingly important role in diagnosis and is currently the most commonly used method of diagnosis because it is non-invasive and, if strict criteria are followed,^{2,3} accurate. However, in developing countries, echocardiographic facilities are not easily available and are relatively expensive when compared with clinical methods.

The purpose of this study was to assess the usefulness of performing echocardiographic examinations on patients with a clinical diagnosis of MVP.

Thirty six consecutive outpatients (male: 10) had been referred for an echocardiogram from the outpatient clinics (non-cardiological) of the University Hospital, Kuala Lumpur, with a clinical diagnosis of probable or definite mitral valve prolapse. By the nature of this study, referring doctors were unaware that such a study was taking place and hence, no uniform diagnostic criteria were used. Their ages ranged from 13–65 years (mean 29.3 years).

All patients underwent a Doppler echocardiogram examination (Toshiba colour Doppler ultrasonograph SH 65 A). Interpretation of the examination was based on established criteria.^{3,4} Mitral valve prolapse was deemed present if it was detected on at least 2 views, one of which included the parasternal long axis view.² Statistical analysis was performed using the chi-square test.

Of the 36 patients, 24 had a clinical diagnosis of definite MVP while 12 had a clinical diagnosis of probable MVP. In the former group, 12 patients (50%) had MVP on echocardiogram and in the latter group, 7 patients (58.3%) had MVP. There was no significant difference in prevalence of MVP between patients with a clinical diagnosis of definite or probable MVP.

It is well known that prevalence rates of MVP based on auscultatory criteria vary depending on the examiner's skill.¹ However, it cannot be expected that all patients in the community will be screened by a skilled cardiologist. The question therefore arises among doctors concerned with health economics, as to whether or not all patients with a possibility of MVP should be submitted to an echocardiographic examination.

The author would submit that, based on this study, echocardiography is justified. Specificity of auscultatory criteria was low. The pool of referring doctors was not preselected and these doctors referred patients in the course of their usual clinical practice. If an echocardiogram was not available, nearly half the patients would have been misdiagnosed as having MVP with its many medical, social and financial implications.

Echocardiography is currently the most widely accepted diagnostic test for MVP and is used to predict prognosis and plan further management.^{2,5} It would not be unreasonable to suggest that this non-invasive test be made freely available to all patients when a diagnosis of MVP is suspected clinically.

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Myasthenia gravis and reversible pyramidal tract signs in a thyrotoxic patient

Sir,

A 33 year old Indian male was admitted with a 3 year history of easy fatigability, tremulousness, weight loss and heat intolerance. Six months previously he had developed protrusion of the eyes, ptosis and diplopia. Later he noticed weakness in both lower limbs, predominantly distal and especially after exertion, which spread to involve the upper limbs, muscles of mastication, swallowing and also the bladder for he started having hesitancy of micturition.

Physical examination revealed bilateral ptosis with restricted ocular movements in all quadrants, with normal vision and fundus, weakness of facial and limb muscles (distal more than proximal), normal tone, generalized hyperreflexia and absent abdominals, cremasterics and bilateral extensor plantar responses.

His neostigmine test and electromyography confirmed the diagnosis of myasthenia gravis. His chest X-ray was normal but computed tomographic scan showed thymic