Correspondence

Australia antigen and circulating lymphocytes in acute viral hepatitis (AVH)

SIR—It is well known (Fiaschi et al., 1970), that in the acute stage of AVH some indices of humoral immunity become altered. The most significant alterations are the increase of IgM (up to 250%) and the appearance in the serum of complement-fixing anti-cytoplasmic antibodies (AICF). These antibodies were present in more than 90% of the 120 patients which we have studied.

The patients also presented atypical circulating mononuclear cells (average 950/mm$^3$) which took up more thymidine $^3$H (mean 2.4% mononuclear cells) and uridine $^3$H (mean 30% mononuclear cells) than normal lymphocytes. These cells were unresponsive (less than 30%) to the blastogenic stimulus with PHA (Fiaschi et al., 1970; Mella & Lang, 1967; Naccarato et al., 1968; Willems, Melnick & Rawes, 1969).

Recently, there has been reported a relationship between the presence of Au antigen and some indices of humoral immunity in the acute stage of AVH (Wright, 1970; Farrow et al., 1970).

We have correlated the presence of Au antigen with DNA and RNA synthesis, and the blastogenic response to PHA of circulating lymphocytes in the first stage of AVH (Fig. 1).

(a) The DNA synthesis was more active in lymphocytes of seven Au-negative patients than five Au-positive patients (mean of mononuclear cells labelled with thymidine $^3$H = 1.2% in Au+ patients and 3.5% in Au− patients)—$P < 0.05$.

(b) The RNA synthesis was the same in the lymphocytes of both Au+ and Au− patients (mean of mononuclear cells labelled with uridine $^3$H: Au+ patients = 34.5%; Au− = 27.7%)—$P > 0.05$.

(c) The blastogenic response to PHA was the same in the lymphocytes of both Au+ and Au− patients (mean of thirteen Au+ patients = 26.8%; of seven Au− patients = 34%)—$P > 0.05$.

In summary we have found a slight increase of lympho-cytic DNA synthesis in Au− patients.

However, this result cannot be strictly correlated with the absence of Au antigen in the blood.

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References


Fig. 1. Studies on lymphocytes in AVH (first 15 days of jaundice). (a) In vitro DNA synthesis, $P < 0.005$. (b) In vitro RNA synthesis, $P > 0.005$. (c) Blastogenic response to PHA, $P > 0.05$. Stippled area denotes normal range; ●, Au+; ○, Au−.