REITER'S DISEASE IN TWO BROTHERS*

BY

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Reiter's disease affecting more than one member of a family has been reported only rarely. Paronen (1948) described three families in whom several members, including women and children, developed Reiter's disease following dysentery. All other reported cases of familial aggregation of Reiter's disease have concerned males alone and have never occurred as a sequel to dysentery. Trier (1950) and Conska (1958) both reported the condition occurring in two brothers, Morton (1958) reported Reiter's disease in first cousins, and Gough (1962) reported the disease in a father and son.

We report a further occurrence of Reiter's disease in two brothers; they lived 400 miles apart and a common contact was excluded. There was no family history of other joint disease or of psoriasis.

Case Reports

Case 1. A 29-year-old married man, with no previous history of articular disease, was admitted to hospital in June, 1965, with a 6-week history of urethral discharge. There had been pain and swelling in the toes of the right foot for 2 weeks and in the right ankle and left knee joint for 3 days. He denied any extra-marital exposure and had had no diarrhoea.

Examination.—He had urethritis, circuminate balanitis, and mild bilateral conjunctivitis. The left knee and right ankle joints were swollen and tender with a limited range of movement. The right wrist, right sacro-iliac, and left temporo-mandibular joints were also involved. Keratoderma blennorrhagica later developed on the soles of the feet (Fig. 1).

Haemoglobin concentration 15·2 g./100 ml.
Erythrocyte sedimentation rate (ESR) was 40 mm. in one hour and subsequently rose to 86 mm. in one hour.
Total leucocyte count 11,000/cu. mm.; normal differential count.
Wassermann reaction, gonococcal complement-fixation test, and latex particle test for rheumatoid factor all negative.

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Case 2. A 21-year-old unmarried man, with no previous history of articular disease, was admitted to hospital in September, 1967, with a 2-week history of pain and swelling of the left great toe, left knee, right ankle, right wrist, and the first and second metacarpophalangeal joints of the right hand. He had also had a greenish urethral discharge occasionally associated with dysuria for the same length of time. He had had no diarrhoea or conjunctivitis. He admitted a casual sexual contact some 4 weeks previously.

Examination.—The left knee, right wrist, and first and second metacarpophalangeal joints of the right hand were swollen and tender with a limited range of movement. There was a urethral discharge and circinate balanitis. One week after admission keratoderma blennorrhagica developed on the soles of the feet (Fig. 2).

Result.—On the completion of this course the patient was symptom-free with an ESR of 4 mm. in one hour, and the only abnormality on examination was the residual keratoderma blennorrhagica which persisted for a further week. There has been no recurrence of symptoms.

Discussion

Weinberger and Bauer (1955) thought that the diagnosis of Reiter’s disease should be restricted to cases in which the triad of non-specific urethritis, conjunctivitis, and acute polyarthritis described by Reiter (1916) was present. However, Montgomery, Poske, Barton, Foxworthy, and Baker (1959) stated that keratoderma blennorrhagica was an equally important diagnostic feature.

Keratoderma blennorrhagica involves chiefly the soles, palms, and nails. Circinate balanitis is essentially the same type of lesion and differs clinically by virtue of the effects of the prepuce. Similar lesions are also frequently found on the hard palate. The incidence of keratoderma blennorrhagica in Reiter’s disease has been reported as 8 per cent. by Hancock (1960), 14 per cent. by Csonka (1958), and 33 per cent. by Popert, Gill, and Laird (1964). All these authors report that circinate balanitis occurs rather more frequently.

Reiter’s disease, as it occurs in the United Kingdom and North America, is usually associated with sexually-transmitted non-specific urethritis (Brit. med. J., 1966), but the disease arises in only a small number of those who contract this infection; Morton (1958) suggested an incidence of 3 to 4 per cent., but Laird (1958) and Csonka (1958) reported 1.7 and 0.8 per cent. respectively. The Ministry of Health (1967) reported that 327 (1.07 per cent.) of 30,464 male cases of non-specific urethritis were complicated by arthritis in 1966.

Various authors have attempted to explain why some patients with non-specific urethritis should develop the other features of Reiter’s disease. Laird (1958) postulated that the disease might arise from sensitization of the tissues following infection in the genito-urinary or alimentary tracts. Csonka (1958) suggested that there might be an hereditary predisposition to the arthritic manifestations of Reiter’s disease on the basis of the increased incidence of rheumatoid arthritis in the relatives of
patients with Reiter’s disease. Lawrence (1965) has
given preliminary results which suggest an increased
incidence of psoriasis and ankylosing spondylitis in
relatives of patients with Reiter’s disease; he has
postulated a possible genetic basis for the disease.

Wright and Reed (1964) suggested that there was
a link between Reiter’s disease and psoriatic
arthropathy. This was supported by Maxwell, Greig,
Boyle, Pasieczny, and Schofield (1966). Both these
groups drew attention to the similarity between the
lesions of keratoderma blennorrhagica and pustular
and rupioid psoriasis depending on whether the
lesions are on the soles and palms or body respecti-
vively. Psoriasis is a condition with a strong familial
aggregation and a small number of individuals
develop the distinctive arthropathy.

It is possible, therefore, that there is some
genetic basis to Reiter’s disease, particularly in those
who develop keratoderma blennorrhagica. The
present report adds support to this concept.

It is also possible that some common genetic
factor governs the occurrence of joint disease both in
individuals with non-specific urethritis and in those
with psoriasis.

Summary

The occurrence of Reiter’s disease in two brothers
is reported. A possible genetic basis for the disease
is discussed. The response of one patient (Case 2) to lincomycin
hydrochloride is described.

We wish to thank Prof. J. J. R. Duthie for permission
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La maladie de Reiter chez deux frères

Résumé

L’apparition de la maladie de Reiter est rapportée.
La possibilité d’une base génétique de cette maladie
est discutée. La réaction d’un des deux malades (le cas
No. 2) à la lincomycine chlorhydrique est décrite.