LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) balanoposthitis in an insulin dependent diabetic male

EDITOR,—Balanoposthitis is a common condition affecting 11% of the male attendees at GUM clinics. It is an inflammation of the glans penis and the prepuce, and its causes include bacterial and yeast infections, parasitic infestations, trauma, and irritants. However, to our knowledge, no case has been reported to be caused by MRSA.

A 49 year old insulin dependent diabetic male was an inpatient for repair of an upper jaw fracture developed a penile itch with swollen foreskin, which was difficult to retract, together with longitudinal fissures on the prepuce and supraprepual discharge. In his recent past he had had two incidents of unprotected sexual intercourse with two known females. He was clinically diagnosed as having candida balanitis and was commenced on clotrimazole cream, which did not produce a clinical response over the course of a week. The swabs taken before the commencement of clotrimazole cream failed to grow candida; however, MRSA resistant to erythromycin, penicillin, and fluocxacillin from the prepuce and subpreputial discharge. Infection was completely resolved his symptoms.

Acetted for publication 8 March 2001

Chlamydia trachomatis reinfection rate: a forgotten aspect of female genital chlamydia management

EDITOR,—Hillis et al. reported that repeated episodes of infection of female genital tract with Chlamydia trachomatis increase the risk of hospital admission for pelvic inflammatory disease and ectopic pregnancy. The first diagnosed attack of genital infection with chlamydia presents the clinician with a unique opportunity to implement measures to minimise the risk of reinfection—that is, health promotion and contact tracing.

During April–June 1998 we reviewed the case notes of female patients who were diagnosed with genital chlamydia at Leicester Royal Infirmary and Derbyshire Royal Infirmary GUM clinics in the year 1996 for evidence of repeat episode of genital chlamydia. We also noted the following data: age at presentation with the first episode of infection, time for presentation with reinfection, test of cure if performed, co-infection with gonorrhoea, review by health adviser, contact(s) traced and treated in the first three months after diagnosis. For the purpose of the study we defined reinfection as a patient testing positive for genital chlamydia 30 days or more after the completion of treatment. We also looked at the genital chlamydia treatment protocols in both clinics.

A total of 540 female patients were diagnosed with chlamydia (311 at Leicester and 229 at Derby). The patients’ mean age at first episode was 22.6 years for Leicester and 23.4 years for Derby. The health advisers had made contact with 94.5% (294) in Leicester and 97.8% (224) in Derby; 85.2% (265) of the patients diagnosed at Leicester returned at 30 days or more and were retested for chlamydia compared with 87.3% (200) at Derby; 9% (24) episodes of repeat infection were identified in Leicester group compared to 17% (34) episodes in the Derby cohort. The mean period for presentation with reinfection was 9.4 months (range 3–25) at Leicester and 9.8 months (range 2–24) at Derby. At Leicester the contacts of 66.5% (207) patients were traced and treated compared to 64.6% (148) at Derby. A test of cure was performed on 282 patient in Leicester (where it was routine practice); 2.5% (seven) were found to be positive for chlamydial infection, while the test of cure was performed on 22 patients in Derby (where it was performed selectively) revealed no positive cases.

Of the reininfected patients 58.3% (14) at Leicester were reininfected because of failure to trace and treat their partner(s) compared to 35.3% (12) at the Derby clinic. Both clinics manage genital chlamydia with what was considered standard treatment and perform contact tracing wherever possible. Two reininfected patients from each clinic were also co-infected with gonorrhoea.

Other risk factors for reinfection—for example, ethnic origin, number of sexual partners,—were not analysed as these data was not discernible from the notes.

This retrospective study highlights the fact that a substantial number of patients get reinfected with chlamydia despite health education and counselling by health advisers. Though the figures (66.5% and 64.6%) for partner notification and treatment were close to that proposed by the Central Audit Group (70%), the proportion for the clinic in Leicester is still too high. Does the message that repeat episodes of genital chlamydia are more damaging get through to our patients or do we need a new health education strategy?

Currently, as the success of treatment of genital chlamydia is evaluated by the level of contact tracing, the number of patients referred to health advisers, and number of contacts per index patient seen and treated,1,2 we believe it is time to evaluate outcome measures in terms of reinfection rates. Large prospective studies need to be done to elucidate this aspect of chlamydial infection management.

Contributions: PS had the original idea; EH collected and analysed the data EH and JD wrote the manuscript.

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Accepted for publication 8 March 2001

The Society of Apothecaries Diploma examination in Genitourinary Medicine: death of the viva voce?

EDITOR,—The London Apothecaries Diploma in Genitourinary Medicine is likely to become even more important in the near future as all specialist registrars and probably...
many non-consultant grades will be expected to pass it as part of higher training in the specialty in the United Kingdom. It would be interesting to have some figures on the number of candidates anticipated in the near future and how this will affect the examination mechanism.

The Apothecaries Diploma Board rejected viva voce examinations some time ago as being prone to bias. This is consistent with much current research on examination techniques. Oral examinations are regarded as being inherently biased and of poor inter-examiner reliability. How much, however, is this also a candidate number related phenomenon? With courses for small numbers, such as the Diploma in Venerology and Genito-urinary Medicine of Liverpool University, we find the viva a key mechanism to discriminate between candidates precisely because the examiner can adjust the level of difficulty of questions to the ability of each candidate. The viva is a good instrument to measure clinical thinking, ability to take a sexual history, and counselling. Role play need not be unique to the province of actors. The viva is particularly useful for borderline candidates—for example, those who are disadvantaged in essays which are notoriously dependent on proficiency in English (not to mention writing skills!). In order to reduce interexaminer variation inherent in the viva, all candidates for the Liverpool Diploma are viva’d independently by both sets of (two) examiners. Clearly, this would be extremely cumbersome and time consuming for the current and anticipated numbers taking the Apothecaries Diploma.

The venerable Apothecaries’ Hall is appar-ently “unsuitable” for projecting slides on a convenient way of basing a clinical skills/data interpretation type examination for a large number of candidates—for example, MRCP Part 2 and many other postgraduate medical examinations. Will the examiners of the Apothecaries Diploma have to begin to think of more appropriate premises for their examination?

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Detection of chlamydia on meatosal swabs

EDITOR,—The advent of ligase chain reaction (LCR) and other DNA technologies and their greater sensitivity1 has allowed the possibility of taking samples other than from the urethra in men, including urine samples. Although urine samples have the advantage of being collected non-invasively, the sensitiv-itv of LCR testing on such samples is less than for urethral samples.2 This may be due to the presence of inhibitors in urine.3 The reduced sensitivity on urine samples may be unacceptable, particularly if testing populations with a high prevalence of chlamydia infection. Furthermore processing of urine samples is more laborious. It is currently recommended that specimens for the detection of genital Chlamydia trachomatis infection by LCR are taken 2–4 cm from the urethral orifice and the swab rotated for 3.5 seconds.4 Many men are unable to tolerate this. It is often painful and may discourage patients from seeking medical attention.

A pilot study was conducted to compare the sensitivity of LCR testing for genital chlamydial infection in men, taken from the meatus itself against the standard technique. All male patients attending the GUM clinic over a 3 month period were included in the study if they had symptoms or signs compat-ible with chlamydia, or if a contact of a known case of chlamydia. A swab was taken from the urethra in the standard fashion. A second swab was taken from the meatus. After the sixth week of the study the order of the first and second swabs was changed, in order to evaluate any bias related to the order of the swabs. Specimens were processed using Abbott Laboratories LCx Chlamydia and handled according to the manufacturer’s guidelines.

Twenty five patients were asked to evaluate the swabs and to state which swab caused least discomfort or if there was no difference between them. A total of 208 men were recruited to the study. The overall prevalence of genital chlamydia infection in our popula-tion was 25% (52/208). A confirmed diag-nosis was made by both the samples performed from the same man were positive for chlamydia, or if one sample was positive together with an equivocal result. There were no false positive tests using these criteria giv-ing all methods a specificity of 100%. There was no significant difference in detection rates between the subgroups where the order of swabs was changed.

A meatosal swab for the detection of chlamy-dia is more acceptable to patients and has a similar sensitivity to the traditional technique of urethral sampling.

Urine samples, although non-invasive, are less likely to yield a positive diagnosis compared to urethral/meatal swabs and require extra processing by laboratories. In a high prevalence setting (such as a sexual health clinic), the medical technique provides a specific, highly sensitive, and well tolerated sampling method for the detection of chlamydia infection in men.

Further studies to confirm our findings in symptomatic, and asymptomatic, chlamydia infection are needed before introducing this technique as routine clinical practice.

Contributors: HIL, principal investigator and author; SM, investigator and editor final draft; JLD, data collection and obtained specimens; MSS, investigator and processed specimens.

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HIV positive and negative homosexual men have adopted different strategies for reducing the risk of HIV transmission

EDITOR,—To reduce the risk of HIV trans-mission, some homosexual men have adopted a strategy whereby they only have unpro-ected anal intercourse (UAI) with a person of the same HIV status (‘matched UAI’). In London, homosexual men in a relationship are more likely to know the HIV status of their UAI partner than men not in a relationship and so establish concordance. However, this was not examined for HIV positive and negative men separately. A survey conducted in January-February 2000 among homosexual/bisexual men attending one of six gyms in central London, as part of an ongoing behavioural surveillance pro-gamme,9 has allowed risk reduction strategies to be considered by HIV status.

A total of 792 homosexual men (median age 35 years) completed a confidential questionnaire (estimated response rate 50–60%)10; 126 (16.0%) were HIV positive, 477 (60.2%) HIV negative. While 169 (21.3%) had never had an HIV test (data missing for 20 men). Just under half the men (54.6%) said they were currently in a relationship with another man; this did not differ significantly by HIV status (p=0.1).

Our analysis focused on how sexual risk behaviour varied both by HIV as well as by relationship status. For HIV negative and positive men, UAI was classified as either concordant (UAI with a partner of the same HIV status) or non-concordant (UAI with a partner of unknown or discordant HIV status). Men reporting more than one UAI partner were classified as concordant only if all UAI partners were of the same HIV status as themselves. Men also indicated whether they had had UAI with a main partner only, casual partner(s), or both. One third of all men (32.9%, 259) reported UAI in the previ-ous 3 months; HIV positive men 42.1% (3/126) HIV negative men 34.6% (42/120) (data missing for two men) (p=0.1). Overall, concordant UAI was reported by 18.7% (89) of HIV negative and 21.4% (27) of HIV posi-tive men (p=0.04). For HIV negative, concordant UAI was predominantly reported by those in a relationship and rarely by men who were not (28.6% v 5.0%, p<0.001) (table 1). Concordant UAI was usually with a main partner alone. By way of comparison, HIV positive men were just as likely to report
Table 1  Unprotected anal intercourse (UAI) in the previous 3 months

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>HIV negative men (n=477*)</th>
<th>HIV positive men (n=126)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Main only</td>
<td>Casual†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men in a relationship reporting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom UAI</td>
<td>27.1 (%)</td>
<td>15.4 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-condom UAI</td>
<td>8.0 (22)</td>
<td>6.5 (18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>35.1 (97)</td>
<td>22.0 (60)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men not in a relationship reporting</td>
<td>n=199</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Condom UAI</td>
<td>2.5 (%)</td>
<td>2.5 (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-condom UAI†</td>
<td>1.5 (%)</td>
<td>16.1 (32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.0 (8)</td>
<td>18.6 (37)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Data on UAI or relationship status missing for two HIV negative men. †Men reporting casual partners only or main and casual partners. Most men reported casual partners only.

Concordant UAI whether they were in a relationship or not (22.2% vs 20.6%, p=0.9), often with a casual rather than main partner. The observation that HIV negative men were more likely to report condom UAI in the context of a relationship while HIV positive men were just as likely to report condom UAI whether they were in a relationship or not was confirmed in a multivariate model. With HIV status and relationship as independent variables and condom UAI as the dependent variable, the association between HIV status and relationship was highly significant (p=0.001).

Seroconcordance among negative men can only be established with confidence if both men are HIV negative. For this reason it is difficult for HIV negative men to establish concordance with a casual partner. On the other hand, HIV positive men can establish concordance, be it with a casual or regular partner, simply by mutual disclosure. This requires no confirmatory test. Although seroconcordant UAI among positive men carries no risk of HIV transmission to an uninfected person, it raises the possibility of negotiation and drug resistance for the men themselves.

These data provide further evidence that HIV positive and negative homosexual men have both adopted HIV risk reduction strategies for the less, high risk sexual behaviour (that is, non-condom UAI) was reported. Overall, non-condom UAI was reported by 15.8% (75) of HIV negative and 22.7% (26) of HIV positive men (p=0.4). No significant differences were seen when stratified by either relationship or HIV status (table 1). In the multivariate model there was no significant association between non-condom UAI and either HIV status (p=0.4) or being in a relationship (p=0.7). Non-condom UAI was usually reported with a casual partner with one notable exception. HIV negative men in a relationship were equally likely to report non-condom UAI with a main partner alone (8.0%) as with a casual partner (6.5%) highlighting the continuing risk for HIV transmission between regular partners. However, for most men the risk of HIV transmission occurred in the context of a casual sexual encounter. Surveys conducted in the gyms in 1998 and 1999 revealed similar patterns of sexual risk behaviour (data available from authors).

In conclusion, HIV negative and homosexual positive men have adopted different strategies for reducing the risk of HIV transmission with their sexual partners. HIV negative men predominantly reported condom UAI with a partner in the context of a relationship while HIV positive men were more likely to report condom UAI with a casual partner. HIV prevention programmes need to reinforce risk reduction strategies, tailored to a person’s HIV status, while simultaneously addressing high risk sexual behaviour.

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A mobile phone text message and Trichomonas vaginalis

Editor,—Over the past decade vast numbers of the general population have accepted the internet, email, and mobile phones. Among new patients attending our centre 70.3% (90/130) of men and 73.7% (90/133) of women provide mobile telephone numbers for contact. However, the use of mobile phones as a mechanism for contact tracing as far as I am aware has not been reported previously.

A 26 year old Afro-Caribbean man presented to our clinic and informed us that his girlfriend had attended a GUM clinic but unfortunately he did not know why. However, he informed us that he had a text message on his mobile. He duly brought up the message, which gave the woman’s clinic number and the KC60 diagnosis of C6A.

On examination there were no abnormalities seen, there were no polymorphs on microscopy, swabs for gonorrhoea, chlamydia, and trichomonas were all clear. He was treated with a 5 day course of metronidazole as per MSSVD guidelines.

If this patient had turned up without a contact slip, epidemiological treatment of trichomonas is unlikely to have been instituted and contact tracing would have been impossible. Thanks to the use of text messaging on this man’s mobile phone, appropriate treatment was initiated. Certainly patients and health advisers appreciate the security offered by mobile phones (no other family members can take the calls), the instant access, and it avoids additional paper work. The use of text messaging and mobile phones for contact tracing may be considered as an adjunct to contact slips in GU clinics.

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Chaperoning male patients

Editor,—I was delighted to see the letter by Fisk et al in the journal.1 My staff and I were becoming alarmed at the suggestion that male patients should have a chaperone when they are being examined by a male doctor. Was common sense finally leaving the specialty? There are thousands of consultations taking place throughout the country, in both primary and secondary care, where sexual issues are discussed. These often include a genital examination, and just because there is a problem found with one or two individual patients or doctors it doesn’t mean the whole national service has to be turned upside down. Surely, the last thing an overworked, under pressure, genitorinary medicine service needs is to have another section of its skilled staff standing idle by in a room, while either a consultation or examination is taking place. I have never found any difficulty in taking the swabs on my own, and labelling the stuff myself, and have never felt the need for another person handing me things during a male examination. Indeed, I could easily see that interfering with the process at times, as there are some issues patients feel more comfortable discussing on a one to one basis, and they can feel embarrassed and hindered if there is a chaperone present.

An occasional complaint is a small price to pay for the 99.9% otherwise effective consultations that occur. It’s lovely to see work like this published, as it becomes part of the evidence base that says we don’t need this

www.sextransinf.com
Lichen sclerosus of the glans is significantly associated with penile carcinoma

EDITOR,—We read with interest the article by Riddell et al on 66 men with penile lichen sclerosus (PLS) attending a department of genitourinary medicine.1 In this study, the authors found no cases of malignancy.

We have previously reported a retrospective study on the incidence of cancer on 86 cases of PLS retrieved from our histopathological files over a 10 year period (1987–97).2 In that study, five cases showed malignant transformation—namely, squamous cell carcinoma (SCC) (three cases), in situ carcinoma (one case), and verrucous carcinoma (one case).

Since that report, we decided to interview all PLS patients in order to rule out any further malignancy that occurred over time. Of 86 patients identified, 00 were evaluated at our clinic. Among these, we found three additional patients treated with partial penectomy for invasive SCC at other institutions. Their medical records were obtained together with paraffin embedded tissue samples to perform polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for human papillomavirus (HPV) testing. Clinical and laboratory information for these cases, together with previously reported patients, are summarised in table 1.

In this current study, eight (9.3%) out of 86 patients with PLS developed an epithelial cancer. Data analysis using the t test confirmed in our series a statistically significant risk of malignant degeneration (p < 0.05).

Clinically, the most common presentation of epithelial cancer arising with PLS was that of an infiltrated or ulcerated plaque followed, in decreasing order of frequency, by a nodular lesion or verrucous papules. The glans was the most commonly affected area. The average age of onset of PLS was 45 years, and that of development of cancer was 62 years. The average lag time from onset of PLS to cancer development was 18 years (range 10–34 years). This long latency time might explain the paucity of cases, mostly anecdotal, reported in the literature in the past 2 years (approximately 20)3,4 compared with our study, in which a long follow up disclosed 9.3% malignant degeneration in a series of 86 patients.

Also, the latency time was shorter in the HPV positive patients (average 15 years) compared with the HPV negative patients (average 23 years). The role of HPV in the pathogenesis of penile cancer is not fully understood. Some HPVs, such as type 16 and 18, are likely to play a part, but not all penile carcinomas are HPV positive, as shown in our study. Also, PLS is not commonly associated with HPV infection.5 In our study we found five patients positive for HPV 16 infection, and this may have hastened the progression towards cancer resulting in a shorter lag time. However, routine HPV testing on larger series is necessary in order to draw any definitive conclusion.

Similarly to vulvar lichen sclerosus, which has been observed to undergo malignant degeneration in 3–6% of women,6 a likely malignant evolution of PLS should be considered. Careful and systematic histopathological evaluation of any ulcerated or indurated plaques developing within PLS is therefore strongly recommended. The association between PLS and cancer may very well be underestimated and there is a need for further investigation that includes long term follow up and routine PCR analysis for HPV infection.

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Table 1 Clinical and histopathological features of eight cases of carcinoma on penile lichen sclerosus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patient No</th>
<th>Age of onset of PLS (years)</th>
<th>Age of onset of Ca (years)</th>
<th>Lag (years)</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Clinical aspect of malignancy on PLS</th>
<th>Histopathology</th>
<th>PCR testing for HPV</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>fungating keratotic nodule with a white-yellowish hue slightly infiltrated verrucous papules</td>
<td>SCC</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>multiple erythematous, indurated, and ulcerated plaques sharply circumscribed, erythematous, oozing, and slightly infiltrated plaque</td>
<td>well differentiated SCC</td>
<td>HPV 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3*</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>glans, coronary sulcus glans, coronary sulcus, inner aspect of the foreskin</td>
<td>well differentiated SCC</td>
<td>HPV 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4*</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>exophytic verrucous whitish nodule sharply circumscribed, erythematous, and ulcerated plaque sharply circumscribed, erythematous, and ulcerated plaque</td>
<td>in situ carcinoma SCC</td>
<td>HPV 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5*</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>sharply circumscribed, erythematous, eroded, crusted, and indurated plaque</td>
<td>SCC</td>
<td>HPV 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>sharply circumscribed, erythematous, eroded, crusted, and indurated plaque</td>
<td>SCC</td>
<td>HPV 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>sharply circumscribed, erythematous, eroded, crusted, and indurated plaque</td>
<td>well differentiated SCC</td>
<td>HPV 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>glans</td>
<td>sharply circumscribed, erythematous, eroded, crusted, and indurated plaque</td>
<td>undifferentiated SCC</td>
<td>negative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Previously reported cases.1
PLS = penile lichen sclerosus; Ca = carcinoma; PCR = polymerase chain reaction; HPV = human papillomavirus; SCC = squamous cell carcinoma; VC = verrucous carcinoma.

References


For publication 15 February 2001

Third trimester screening or safer sex to prevent mother to child transmission of HIV

EDITOR,—Since 1992 Department of Health guidelines have recommended that HIV screening be offered to all pregnant women in high seroprevalence areas of high seroprevalence7 but implementation and uptake has been poor. In 1998 an intercollegiate working party recommended that HIV testing be integrated with antenatal screening for other infections and that the test should be offered and recommended to all pregnant women in high seroprevalence areas.8 In 1999 the Department of Health extended these recommendations to all regions aiming to reduce neonatal HIV infection by 80% by 2002.9 We present the case of an infant with symptomatic HIV infection, whose mother's antenatal HIV test was negative and discuss the implications.

A 3 month old female, born at term by spontaneous vaginal delivery and breastfed, presented with a 1 week history of increasing respiratory difficulty. Following further deterioration, she was transferred to St Mary’s Hospital and ventilated. Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP) was diagnosed on bronchoalveolar lavage. Anti-HIV antibodies were present in serum and HIV infection was confirmed by the detection of HIV-DNA in peripheral blood mononuclear cells (PBMC) by PCR amplification. HIV-1 infection was confirmed in both parents. Her asymptomatic mother had received antenatal care from the 12th week of gestation and was HIV seronegative at 29 weeks. To investigate a
Table 1 Peripartum HIV test results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time (in weeks of gestation)</th>
<th>1 T = 12 weeks (“Booking blood”)</th>
<th>2 T = 29 weeks</th>
<th>3 T = 33 weeks (“Booking blood”)</th>
<th>4 T = 13 weeks post partum (child presents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hospital where blood taken</td>
<td>X Blood was stored and retrospectively tested</td>
<td>Y Index antenatal test (serum not available for repeat retrospective testing)</td>
<td>Y Blood was stored and retrospectively tested</td>
<td>St Mary’s Postnatal test. Blood stored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV specific antibody tests (CPHL in-house EIA)</td>
<td>Clear negatives, (OD/CO) HIV IgG=4.99, IgM=0.36, IgA=0.44</td>
<td>Strong positives, (OD/CO) HIV IgG=12.34, IgM=10.94, IgA=5.28</td>
<td>Strong positives for IgG and IgA: weak positive OD/CO HIV IgG=15.41, IgM=3.14, IgA=4.18. *Note decreasing values for IgM and IgA compared to previous HIV1 gag p17+, p24++, p55+, pol p31++, p51++, p66++, env gp41+, gp120+, gp160++, HIV2 gag36-417, Quaniplex HIV-1 RNA 3.0, 82400 Cobas Amplicor HIV-1 Monitor v1.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV western blot</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>——</td>
<td>——</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV RNA (copies/ml)</td>
<td>Not detected (&lt; Limit of detection) Cobas Amplicor HIV-1 Monitor v1.5</td>
<td>Not detected (&lt; Limit of detection) Cobas Amplicor HIV-1 Monitor v1.5</td>
<td>Not detected (&lt; Limit of detection) Cobas Amplicor HIV-1 Monitor v1.5</td>
<td>Not detected (&lt; Limit of detection) Cobas Amplicor HIV-1 Monitor v1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Enzyme immunoassay (EIA) for detection of antibody to HIV-1 and 2. Biochem Immunossys Inc, Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

1EIA for detection of antibody to HIV-1 (Abbott Murex), Murex Biotech Ltd, Dartford, UK.
2EIA for qualitative detection of HIV-1 and 2. Abbott Laboratories, USA.
3EIA for detection of antibodies to HIV-1 and 2 (Abbott Murex), Murex Biotech Ltd, Dartford, UK.
4Passive particle agglutination test for detection of antibodies to HIV-1 and 2. Fujirebio Inc, Tokyo, Japan.
5HIV transmissions to antibodies to HIV-1 and 2. Genelabs Diagnostics, Singapore.
6Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) for quantitative detection of HIV-1 RNA. Roche Diagnostics, Branchburg, NJ, USA.
7Signal amplification nucleic acid probe assay for quantitative detection of HIV-1 RNA. Chiron Corp Emeryville, CA, USA.

Possible false negative result, other sera stored at various times were retrieved and tested. The results, which show seroconversion late in pregnancy, are summarised in table 1.

The HIV antibody test is usually performed at the booking visit with other routine antenatal screens. This allows the parents time to adjust to the diagnosis before delivery, to consider family planning issues and interventions to minimise the risk of mother to child transmission. In addition, mothers with advanced immunosuppression benefit from antiretroviral therapy. Although rarely reported, an HIV seronegative mother whose partner has undiagnosed HIV infection is at continued risk of infection. This may become more common in the United Kingdom as heterosexual intercourse is now the most common risk for HIV infection in newly diagnosed patients. Primary HIV infection during gestation or lactation is associated with an increased risk of mother to child transmission.

Repeat antenatal screening late in pregnancy, as is recommended for syphilis in the United States, would identify some primary HIV infections during gestation. However, if maternal infection is not prevented transmission during lactation would remain a risk and there would be significant logistic and cost implications. The extension of testing for HIV (and other infections) to the partners of pregnant women is appealing as both mater- nutal and infant infections could be prevented (and the infected male may benefit from earlier diagnosis and treatment) but would require a fundamental change to antenatal care. A practical approach, which may prevent maternal and neonatal infection (but not identify the infected male) is to use the opportunity, when giving negative HIV, hepatitis B, and syphilis results to the mother, to discuss the sexual transmission of infections, to emphasise that the negative results cannot be extrapolated to the partner, and advocate safer sex, which is commonly abandoned following conception.

Contributors: PG obtained samples and results, monitored virology and immunology, wrote and amended paper; RH monitored virology, immunology, amendments to paper; HL was involved in clinical management of child, amendments to paper; JP monitored PHLS Colindale tests, amendments to paper; GT was involved in clinical management of mother, helped write and amend paper.

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Economic advantages of ligase chain reaction for diagnosis of genital Chlamydia trachomatis infection in GUM clinic attenders

Editor—Genital infection with Chlamydia trachomatis is highly prevalent and recognised as a major threat to public health. There is now a wealth of evidence to demon- strate the superiority of DNA amplification techniques over antigen detection and culture. Only one large study has directly compared ligase chain reaction (LCR) with enzyme immunoassay (EIA) on identical clinical material and no studies have ana- lysed the health economic impact of LCR in a genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinic population.

We studied the diagnostic effectiveness and cost of LCR compared with EIA. All GUM attendees undergoing sexual health screening were offered the opportunity to participate. Men presenting with dysuria or urethral discharge were defined as sympto- matic. Swabs were collected in a pre- randomised order from the cervix in female patients and 4–5 cm proximal to the urethral meatus in male patients. Urethral specimens in male patients were evaluated for evidence of urethritis (defined by >4 polymorphs per high powered field). LCR was performed using a standard immunoassay technique (Organon Chlamydia-Tek), with confirmation of reactive tests by microdot DIF. LCR (LCX sys- tem, Abbott Laboratories) was also per- formed on every specimen. Specimens
testing positive by LCR alone were retested by EIA and 10/153 (7%) from female patients were positive for Chlamydia trachomatis.

A total of 148 male and 153 female patients were tested; 23/148 (16%) swabs from male patients and 10/153 (7%) from female patients were positive for Chlamydia trachomatis by LCR (see fig 1).

The sensitivity, specificity, and positive predictive values, were 100%, 100%, 100%, 100%, 58%, 100%, 95%, 100%, £4.05.

Of 33 cases of chlamydial infection, 15 cases (12 (92.3%) in men and two (20.0%) in women) would have remained undetected if EIA had been used alone.

Although EIA tests cost less than LCR, the inferior detection rate for EIA (17 patients need to be screened per case detected) compared with LCR (nine patients screened per case detected) was also included in analysis of the results.

The clinic in which the study was conducted serves 6000 new attendees annually. Had EIA been used alone, 276 cases of chlamydial infection would have been missed in a one year period, at an estimated cost of over £82,000. A full economic evaluation would require that these long term health and economic benefits be measured and compared with other uses of NHS resources.

In summary, this study demonstrates that the overall sensitivity of LCR was double that of EIA, the previous standard diagnostic test used. Because of its improved sensitivity and increased case detection rate, the cost of LCR per case detected is equivalent to that of EIA in an urban UK GUM clinic population. Use of LCR as the diagnostic test of choice for both screening and clinical diagnosis in this setting thus represents a cost effective strategy.

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NOTICES

International Herpes Alliance and International Herpes Management Forum The International Herpes Alliance has introduced a website (www.herpessaience.org) from which can be downloaded patient information leaflets. Its sister organisation, the International Herpes Management Forum (website: www.IHMF.org) has launched new guidelines on the management of herpesvirus infections in pregnancy at the 9th International Congress on Infectious Disease (ICID) in Buenos Aires.

Pan-American Health Organization, regional office of the World Health Organization A catalogue of publications is available online (www.paho.org). The monthly journal of PAHO, the Pan American Journal of Public Health, is also available (subscriptions: pubsvc@tsp.sheridan.com).

Further details: ECEAR 2001 Conference Secretary, Division of Pathobiology, NIBSC, Blanchie Lane, South Mimms, Potters Bar, Herts, EN6 3QG, UK.

International Congress of Sexually Transmitted Infections, 24–27 June 2001, Berlin, Germany
Further details: Congress Partner GmbH, Krausenstrasse 63, D-10117, Berlin, Germany (tel: +49-30-204 500 41; fax: +49-30-204 500 42; email: berlin@cpb.de).

1st Asia Pacific Forum on Quality Improvement in Health Care The 1st Asia Pacific Forum on Quality Improvement in Health Care will be held from 19–21 September 2001 in Sydney, Australia. Presented by the BMJ Publishing Group (London, UK) and Institute for Healthcare Improvement (Boston, USA), with the support of the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care (Australia), Safety and Quality Council (Australia), NSW Health (Australia) and Ministry of Health (New Zealand). Further details: quality@bma.org.uk; fax +44 (0) 7385 8669.

41st St Andrew’s Day Festival Symposium on Therapeutics The 41st St Andrew’s Day Festival Symposium on Therapeutics will be held on 6–7 December 2001 at the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Further details: Ms Eileen Strawn, Symposium Co-ordinator (tel: 0131 225 7324; fax: 0131 220 4393; email: e.strawn@rcpe.ac.uk; website: www.rcpe.ac.uk).

10th International Congress on Behçet’s Disease will be held in Berlin 27–29 June 2002 Further details: Professor Ch Zouboulis (email: zoubbere@zedat.fu-berlin.de).

5th World Congress of Perinatal Medicine, 22–27 September 2001, Palau de Congressos de Barcelona - Avda Maria Cristina s/n, Barcelona, Spain
Further details: Dr Francesc Figueras, Congress Promotion Secretary (fax: +34 93 451 74 38; www.perinatal2001.com).

Second International Conference on Sexual Health, to be held in Bangkok, Thailand on 23–28 February 2002. Calls for abstracts deadline 1 September 2001 Further details: European Secretariat, Dr Richard Burack (tel: +44 (0) 20 8599 8029; email: siamcare@aol.com).

International Conference on HIV/AIDS 16–19 December 2001, Mumbai, India
Further details: Dr Chander P Puri, President, Indian Society for Study of Reproduction and Fertility, Institute for Research in Reproduction, Jehangir Merwanji Street, Parel, Mumbai 400012, India (Tel: 413770 (Direct), 4132111-2-6-7; fax: 091-022-496485 or 091-022-4139412; e-mail: vicchin@bom4.vsnl.net.in OR dirirr@vsnl.com).

10th International Symposium on Human Chlamydial Infection, 16–21 June 2002, in Antalya, Turkey
The scientific programme will encompass the breadth of chlamydial research from clinical and epidemiological studies to molecular and cell biology of all species of Chlamydia. Further details: Professor A Demir Serter, Department of Clinical Microbiology and Infectious Diseases, Ege University, Faculty of Medicine, 35100 Bornova, Izmir, Turkey (Fax: 90 232 343 71 30; e-mail: ISHCIC5@tso.ucsf.edu).

20th World Congress of Dermatology, Paris, 1–5 July 2002
Further details: P Fournier, Colloquium, 12 rue de la Croix St Faubin, 75011 Paris, France (Tel: +33 1 44 64 15 15; fax: +33 1 44 64 15 16; email: p.fournier@colloquium.com; website: www.derm-wcd-2002.com).

Figure 1 Chlamydia detection by diagnostic test. LCR = ligase chain reaction; EIA = enzyme immunoassay.