**Pasteurella septica** infection in respiratory disease

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Bacteria of the genus *Pasteurella* are well recognized in the veterinary world as the cause of various diseases of domestic, farm, and wild animals, such as fowl cholera and epidemic haemorrhagic septicaemia of swine and cattle. Since the earliest reports of human infection from Europe, Schipper (1947) collected 21 cases recorded between 1919 and 1946: eight of these had infected bites, and seven had pulmonary infection. Of the 37 cases reviewed by Olsen and Needham (1952) and seen at the Mayo Clinic, 35 had disease of the upper and lower respiratory tract, and bronchiectasis was confirmed by bronchography in 30. *Pasteurella septica* was recovered from bronchial aspirates but rarely from sputum, and it was considered that the organism was a secondary invader in pre-established bronchiectasis. In the United Kingdom, Cawson and Talbot (1955) reported two cases of bronchiectasis in farmers secondarily infected with *P. septica* and suggested cats and dogs as the commonest source—an observation supported by Smith (1955), who isolated it from tonsillar swabs in 54% of 111 London dogs. Further case reports by Bartley (1960), DeBoer and Dumler (1963), Freigang and Elliott (1963), Brodie and Henderson (1963), and Maneche and Toll (1964) confirm that *P. septica* may appear in the sputum cultures of patients with chronic infection of the respiratory tract following animal contact.

Because it is an unusual finding, and in view of the recent interest shown in zoonoses generally, eight cases encountered in Gloucestershire during a four-year period are reported; in some of them the infection may have played an important part in the current acute respiratory illness.

**ILLUSTRATIVE CASE HISTORIES**

CASE 7 A housewife, aged 50, who had suffered from periodic bronchitis for five years, was admitted to hospital with widespread bronchopneumonia in 1965, and *P. septica* was the sole organism in the sputum culture. It was resistant to sulphonamide, penicillin, tetracycline, and erythromycin, but clinically and radiologically she responded to ampicillin, and *P. septica* disappeared from the sputum. Subsequent bronchography revealed generalized bronchial diverticulosis. During further chest infections six, eight, and nine months later, *P. septica* reappeared in the sputum cultures, and her serum agglutinated a viable suspension of her sputum organisms, on each occasion at a maximum titre of 1/80. She had a cat.

CASE 8 A housewife of 75 was admitted to hospital with bilateral lower lobe pneumonia, and both *Staphylococcus aureus* and *P. septica* were cultured from the sputum in equal proportions. She improved generally and radiologically after treatment with novobiocin, and *Staph. aureus* disappeared from the sputum, but *P. septica* persisted in two further cultures during the following three weeks, when she relapsed with pneumonia, developed right-sided empyema, and died. Necropsy showed extensive bronchopneumonia, lower lobe bronchiectasis, and a right-sided empyema. In addition, there was cirrhosis of the liver, and microscopic examination revealed small abscesses in which were clumps of small Gram-negative coco-bacilli with bipolar staining, indistinguishable from *P. septica*. She had been in contact with a cat.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

All eight patients suffered from chronic disease of the upper or lower respiratory tract, and all gave histories of close contact with dogs, cats, cattle, or sheep.

During acute episodes of infection, *P. septica* was isolated on more than one occasion from the sputum of all cases except case 1, and it was notably resistant to erythromycin in five of the eight cases. In all instances except the first isolation in case 8, the second in case 4, and the fourth in case 6, it was the predominant organism, and although it occasionally persisted after antibiotic therapy without harmful effect, as in case 3, its removal from the sputum was always associated with clinical improvement.

Although sputum culture in patients with chronic pulmonary disease is often thought to be unhelpful, this series suggests the opposite. In two patients who died from pneumonia while still
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Table
Features in 8 Cases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Animal Contact</th>
<th>Respiratory Disease</th>
<th>Pasteurella Isolations</th>
<th>Antibiotic Resistance</th>
<th>Other Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Post-tuberculous bronchiectasis; recurrent bronchitis Emphysema; bronchopneumonia Bronchiectasis; recurrent bronchitis</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Sulphonamide</td>
<td>No further isolations after severing animal contact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dog</td>
<td>Recurrent bronchitis Emphysema; bronchopneumonia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Erythromycin, novobiocin</td>
<td>Death due to pneumonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cattle, sheep, dog, cat</td>
<td>Bronchiectasis Chronic sinusitis; recurrent bronchitis</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Erythromycin</td>
<td>Serum agglutinins absent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cattle, pigs, dog</td>
<td>Bronchiectasis; recurrent bronchitis Emphysema; bronchial diverticulosis</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Sulphanamide, erythromycin</td>
<td>Death due to cor pulmonale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Bronchiectasis; recurrent bronchitis Emphysema; bronchial diverticulosis; bronchopneumonia</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Erythromycin</td>
<td>Death due to respiratory failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dog, cat</td>
<td>Bulbous emphysema; recurrent bronchitis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sulphonamide, penicillin, tetacycline, erythromycin</td>
<td>Serum agglutinins present (titre 1:80) during three infections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>Bronchiectasis; bronchopneumonia; emphysema</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Death due to pneumonia and empyema; P. septica present in cirrhotic liver abscesses at necropsy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cases 1 and 2 were in patients with chronic bronchitis and emphysema. In both cases the infection was due to P. septica, and there were no other serious underlying conditions. In case 3 the patient was a 15-year-old boy with recurrent bronchitis and emphysema. He was treated with penicillin and recovered completely. In case 4 the patient was a 56-year-old woman with recurrent bronchitis and emphysema. She was treated with sulphonamide and recovered completely. In case 5 the patient was a 56-year-old woman with recurrent bronchitis and emphysema. She was treated with erythromycin and recovered completely. In case 6 the patient was a 72-year-old man with recurrent bronchitis and emphysema. He was treated with sulphonamide and recovered completely. In case 7 the patient was a 50-year-old woman with recurrent bronchitis and emphysema. She was treated with erythromycin and recovered completely. In case 8 the patient was a 75-year-old man with recurrent bronchitis and emphysema. He was treated with sulphonamide and recovered completely.

In case 8 the presence of clumps of P. septica-like organisms in the cirrhotic liver abscesses at a time when this organism was being excreted in the sputum suggests that metastatic lesions may have been produced by a wider extension of the organism following further breakdown in host resistance. Searches for similar groups of bacteria in the lungs sections have proved negative.

Frequency of bronchiectasis as a background to P. septica infection is confirmed, and this series further demonstrates that other permanent structural abnormalities of the respiratory tract may underlie it, such as bronchial diverticulosis, bulbous emphysema, and abnormalities of the nasal sinuses. These findings emphasize the facility with which damaged tissue may be contaminated, and justify combined bacteriological and serological investigations for P. septica in new exacerbations of infection in chronic chest disease, where there has been close contact with domestic or farm animals.

Summary

P. septica was the predominant organism in the sputum of eight cases of chronic respiratory disease with acute exacerbations, four of whom subsequently died. All had a history of recent animal contacts.

The findings of serum agglutinins at a titre of 1 in 80 in one case, and clumps of organisms in abscesses in the liver of another, support the impression that P. septica may occasionally play
a more important pathogenic role than has hitherto been suspected.

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