TREATMENT WITH EPOPROSTENOL OF PULMONARY ARTERIAL HYPERTENSION FOLLOWING MITRAL VALVE REPLACEMENT FOR MITRAL STENOSIS

CASE REPORT

A 46 year old woman, diagnosed at the age of 11 with acute rheumatic fever, underwent placement of a #26 Duran ring for mitral regurgitation in 1991. Pulmonary artery pressures were normal although mild mitral stenosis was noted postoperatively. She was lost to follow up.

In 1999 she sought medical attention because of dyspnoea and orthopnoea. Cardiac catheterisation showed severe pulmonary hypertension (mean pulmonary artery pressure 48 mm Hg) with a 14 mm Hg gradient across the mitral valve (pulmonary capillary wedge pressure 18 mm Hg). In August 1999 she underwent mitral valve replacement with a 23 mm St Jude prosthesis. Postoperative transoesophageal echocardiography showed good function of the new prosthesis, but severe pulmonary hypertension persisted.

In June 2001 she again sought medical attention because of dyspnoea with the slightest activity. Echocardiography showed a normally functioning prosthetic mitral valve and severe pulmonary hypertension. Diagnostic workup did not suggest another aetiology for pulmonary hypertension. Cardiac catheterisation showed severe pulmonary hypertension without evidence of mitral stenosis (table 1). Continuous intravenous epoprostenol (Flolan) was begun. Over the next 4 months the dose was increased from 7 ng/kg/min to 23 ng/kg/min and the patient noted improvement in her exercise capacity. Six and 17 months after beginning epoprostenol repeat right heart catheterisation showed significant and sustained reductions of pulmonary artery pressure and pulmonary vascular resistance (table 1).

DISCUSSION

Pulmonary hypertension frequently complicates mitral stenosis. Increased pulmonary artery pressure results from raised left atrial pressure, pulmonary arteriolar constriction, and obliteratorive changes in the pulmonary vascular bed, and usually responds to surgical relief of mitral stenosis. However, severe pulmonary hypertension may persist after surgical treatment of mitral stenosis. We describe a patient whose severe pulmonary hypertension following mitral valve replacement was treated successfully with continuous intravenous epoprostenol.

Epoprostenol was first introduced for the treatment of primary pulmonary hypertension in 1984. Subsequent investigations showed that continuous intravenous administration of epoprostenol provided effective treatment for pulmonary arterial hypertension related to the CREST variant of systemic sclerosis, human immunodeficiency virus infection, and portopulmonary hypertension. These observations expanded the use of epoprostenol to patients with pulmonary arterial hypertension, but the use of epoprostenol to treat pulmonary hypertension associated with surgically corrected mitral stenosis has not been described.

**Table 1** Haemodynamic variables 2 years after mitral valve replacement (baseline) and after long term epoprostenol treatment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baseline</th>
<th>Epoprostenol 6 months</th>
<th>Epoprostenol 17 months</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean systemic arterial pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean right atrial pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean pulmonary arterial pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardiac output (/min)</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulmonary artery occlusion pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>16*</td>
<td>18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left ventricular end diastolic pressure (mm Hg)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pulmonary vascular resistance (dyne s/cm²)</td>
<td>1560</td>
<td>1072</td>
<td>999</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Epoprostenol dose 24 ng/kg/min.
†Epoprostenol dose 26 ng/kg/min.
§Thrombosis of the anterior leaflet of the St Jude valve led to mild increases in pulmonary artery occlusion pressure at 6 months and 17 months after epoprostenol was started.
Epoprostenol after mitral valve replacement

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REFERENCES

LUNG ALERT

Does a raised pro-BNP level in pleural fluid aid the diagnosis of effusion due to heart failure?


Plasma levels of B-type natriuretic peptide (BNP) are increased in heart failure. The aim of this study was to assess the usefulness of BNP measurements in pleural fluid from patients with and without heart failure. The pro-BNP concentration was measured in 117 pleural fluid samples taken from patients with heart failure, malignant effusions, tuberculous pleurisy, parapneumonic effusions, hepatic hydrothorax, and effusions secondary to pulmonary embolism. In patients with heart failure the median level of pro-BNP was significantly higher than in all other groups (p<0.001). A pleural fluid BNP concentration of ≥1500 pg/ml had a sensitivity of 91% and specificity of 93% for the diagnosis of cardiac failure and, furthermore, a high pro-BNP level helped to correctly identify those heart failure patients, mostly on diuretics, who were classed as having exudates according to Light’s criteria.

There are, however, limitations to the study. It is not reported whether pro-BNP levels were more predictive of heart failure than clinical variables such as a history of myocardial infarction, and it did not compare the pleural pro-BNP concentration with plasma BNP levels. Further studies are required to clarify the clinical usefulness of pleural fluid BNP assay.

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Treatment with epoprostenol of pulmonary arterial hypertension following mitral valve replacement for mitral stenosis

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