Potential risk factors for recurrence of pulmonary tuberculosis

Among UK residents of South Asian descent potential risk factors for pulmonary tuberculosis (PTB) and, possibly, also for its recurrence, include vitamin D deficiency (as proposed by Crofts et al.), the population-attributable fraction (PAF) for PTB attributable to diabetes mellitus,3 and stage-end chronic kidney disease (CKD). The PAF for PTB attributable to diabetes mellitus can be as high as 19.6% (95% CI 10.9% to 33.1%) and 14.2% (95% CI 7.1% to 26.5%) for UK Asian men and women, respectively, versus 6.9% (95% CI 3.1% to 12.4%) and 8.2% (95% CI 3.0% to 15.6%) for their white male and female counterparts, respectively. Furthermore, in the presence of diabetes mellitus, recognition and treatment of PTB can be complicated by the fact that its radiographic stigmata can simulate those of lower lobe community-acquired pneumonia, and by the fact that median time to culture conversion may be significantly (p=0.03) longer in subjects with diabetes than in their counterparts without diabetes. Relative to their white counterparts, UK Asians also have a 13.66-fold higher risk of end-stage diabetic nephropathy, and end-stage CKD itself being associated with an acquired immunodeficiency state characterised by a 10- to 25-fold increase in risk of PTB. When vitamin D deficiency complicates CKD this might, arguably, further compound the risk of PTB and its recurrence.

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Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

Accepted 23 August 2010
Published Online First 21 June 2011

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Authors’ reply

In response to Dr Jolobe, our understanding of the epidemiology of tuberculosis in South Asians in the UK is that extrapulmonary disease is more common in this group. South Asians are therefore not necessarily predisposed only to pulmonary tuberculosis and its recurrence but to tuberculosis in general. What is likely is that being immunocompromised in this population, arising potentially from vitamin D deficiency and type 2 diabetes, is the important risk factor for tuberculosis and its recurrence. We therefore agree that diabetes could be another reason why South Asians appear to be at greater risk than other groups for recurrence of tuberculosis, but not necessarily just pulmonary forms of the disease. Although we have discussed potential factors associated with recurrence, national surveillance does not collect information on diabetes precluding us from assessing its role.

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Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; not externally peer reviewed.

Accepted 25 August 2010
Published Online First 21 June 2011

REFERENCES

methods require the use of gas cylinders which are costly, unwieldy, carry potential Health and Safety hazards, and incur significant expense for shipping and daily hire.

We use a mains-powered hypoxic gas generator (Hypoxico Everest Summit II, Secual Technologies, San Diego, CA, USA), a CE-certified molecular filtration unit delivering hypoxic gas mixtures via a full-face continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) mask, or into a sealed tent for paediatric or mask-intolerant patients. Supplementary oxygen is easily administered by nasal cannula in conjunction with the mask or tent. This equipment is commonly used by mountainers to acclimatise to high altitude and by athletes in altitude training for performance enhancement.\(^4\)\(^5\) We have found it to have several advantages for hypoxic challenge testing. As a result of no longer purchasing nitrogen cylinders we have recouped the cost of the equipment after \(\sim 60\) tests; centres using other methods, such as a 15% oxygen mixture with a breathing circuit or in a body box, which require additional equipment and higher gas consumption, may find the cost savings to be greater. The generator delivers a stable mixture of hypoxic gas, confirmed in validation tests using a calibrated oxygen analyser (Maxtec OM25-RME, Maxtec, Salt Lake City, Utah, USA). This showed a constant output of \(15\pm0.1\%\,\text{O}_2\) for \(>1\) h, so avoiding the risk of excessive hypoxia.

The generator can be easily adjusted to deliver mixtures equivalent to any altitude up to 29 000 ft (8839 m). This ease of adjustment of \(\text{FiO}_2\) provides improved versatility in research and clinical testing. For instance, a hypoxaemic patient planned a month-long holiday at high altitude but did not wish to use supplementary oxygen. By using the generator to vary \(\text{FiO}_2\) to levels equivalent to altitudes up to 10 000 ft (3048 m) and measuring the resultant \(\text{PaO}_2\), we found that by staying at an altitude no higher than 6000 ft she could be expected to maintain a \(\text{PaO}_2\) of at least 7.3 kPa. She was able to take this holiday within the prescribed altitude limit without ill effect.

We believe mains-powered hypoxic gas generation to be a safe and potentially cost-effective alternative to using cylinders of nitrogen or gas mixtures for centres offering a pre-flight assessment service or undertaking research.

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Competing interests None.

Provenance and peer review Not commissioned; externally peer reviewed.

Accepted 8 November 2010
Published Online First 1 December 2010

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Mains-powered hypoxic gas generation: a cost-effective and safe method to evaluate patients at risk from hypoxia during air travel
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Thorax 2011 66: 731-732 originally published online December 1, 2010
doi: 10.1136/thx.2010.141655

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