Endocarditis in older people

SIR—Lactobacillus is a commensal anaerobic gram-positive rod found in the mouth, genitourinary and gastrointestinal tract [1]. To date, only three cases of Lactobacillus endocarditis have been described in immunocompromised patients [2]. We describe an 82-year-old patient with Lactobacillus endocarditis.

This man was admitted to the Geriatric Department of the University Hospital in Geneva with weight loss and gastrointestinal dysfunction. He was found to have a fever of 39°C and macroscopic pyuria. Physical examination revealed an aortic ejection systolic murmur. The white blood cell count was 15×10^9/l with 88% neutrophils and the C-reactive protein 71 mg/l (<5 mg/l). Urine microscopy showed a large number of leukocytes and bacteriuria. Urine culture was positive for *Escherichia coli* and the first two sets of blood cultures (both aerobic and anaerobic) were initially positive for *Escherichia coli* and two days later for Lactobacillus species also. We considered Lactobacillus to be a contaminant. Diagnosis of urinary tract infection with bacteremia was presumed and ceftriaxone treatment introduced.

After seven days, as the patient’s condition did not improve, a second set of blood cultures (3 bottles) was still positive for a Lactobacillus species. Transthoracic echocardiogram showed a thickened non-coronary cusp of the aortic valve consistent with infectious endocarditis (Figure 1). According to the modified Duke’s criteria we subsequently made a diagnosis of an aortic valve Lactobacillus endocarditis [3]. We changed antibiotic therapy to penicillin G plus gentamicin intravenously, with subsequent improvement of symptoms and regression of fever. After 19 days of treatment, gentamicin was stopped because of renal failure, and penicillin was interrupted at day 27 because of a skin rash. Clindamycin was subsequently administered intravenously for another 3 weeks and the patient improved.

Lactobacillus was first described as a heart pathogen in 1938 by Marschall *et al.* [4]. As part of the human flora, it is usually considered as non-pathogenic. In some situations, however, it is responsible for bacteremia, urinary tract infection, dental caries, pelvic infections, intra-abdominal or liver abscesses, meningitis, pneumonia and also endocarditis [5, 6]. In a laboratory-based...
series, 39% (15/38 isolates) of Lactobacillus isolates were documented with clinically significant infection [7]. Therefore, Lactobacillus in blood cultures should always alert clinicians to a clinically significant bacteraemia [8]. The pathogen itself is not very virulent and the prognosis of bacteraemia itself is favourable, but as it is often diagnosed in patients with severe underlying illnesses, it is a marker of frailty [9]. Only 3 cases of lactobacillus endocarditis were reported in older patients between 1983 and 2000 [10–12].

Antibiotic treatment is somewhat difficult in elderly subjects because standard therapy with aminoglycoside and penicillin may lead to complications such as renal insufficiency. Cephalosporins or vancomycin are not appropriate alternative antimicrobial agents because of frequent resistance problems [5–13]. In contrast, clindamycin shows in vitro sensitivities with a favourable profile and can be used as an effective alternative drug when other treatments fail [14]. Nevertheless, in spite of appropriate treatment, prognosis of Lactobacillus endocarditis is poor and post-infection need for valve-replacement is quite frequent [12].

**Didier Schoevaerdts, Hugo Sax, Gaëtan Gavazzi, Jean-Jacques Perrenoud, Jean-Pierre Michel, Cornel C. Sieber**

Département de Gériatrie, Hôpitaux Universitaires de Genève, Route de Mon-Ideé, CH-1226 Thônex, Geneva, Switzerland

Fax: (+ 41) 22 305 61 15

Email: cornel.sieber@hcuge.ch