SHORT-COURSE THERAPY IN TUBERCULOUS MENINGITIS. A STUDY OF 16 PATIENTS

HOSSEIN PAHLAVANZADEH, M.D, and
ABBAS MONTAZERI, M.D.

From the Department of Medicine, Section of Infectious and Tropical Diseases, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Islamic Republic of Iran.

ABSTRACT

From 1986-1989, sixteen patients suffering from TB meningitis aged 12-58, with CSF smear or culture positive for *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* were hospitalized and treated with rifampin (RIF), isoniazid (INH), pyrazinamide (PZA) and ethambutol (ETB) for nine months.

In all patients, ETB and PZA were withdrawn after three months and INH and RIF were continued for the next six months. 81.2 percent of patients were in stages 2 and 3 of this illness, and steroids were added to their treatment regimes. In two patients whose liver enzymes and blood uric acid levels increased during the second week of therapy, INH was discontinued temporarily and PZA was replaced with streptomycin. In the remaining patients, side effects of drugs and central, peripheral and other complications were trivial. Mortality rate was 25%, follow-up of the patients continued for 12-24 months.

According to the mortality and morbidity of classic 12-18 months therapy with three drugs and results obtained in this study, treatment with four drugs for nine months showed some advantages to the other protocols.

We look forward to finding more documents and similar studies from other centers. Confirmation of results of this study could be a suggestion for short-course therapy in TB meningitis, and this is the first report of short-course therapy in TB meningitis from Iran.

**INTRODUCTION**

Tuberculous meningitis is one of the most serious complications of tuberculous infections. The mortality of this entity remains unacceptably high, with case fatality rates of up to 50% in some countries.1,2 The difficulties of rapidly diagnosing TB meningitis in many hospitals are well known,3 and delays in diagnosis result in a poorer outcome. A substantial proportion of the patients who survive are likely to suffer from neurological sequelae which can manifest during the treatment course or after its completion.

**METHODS AND MATERIAL**

From 1986-1989, sixteen patients suffering from TB meningitis, living in the northwest of Iran (provinces of Azarbeydjan & Kurdestan) aged 12-58 years were hospitalized. In all patients, C.S.F. smear, culture and routine blood biochemistry, LFT, RFT, PPD, chest x-ray, skull CT scan and other laboratory measures were performed.

All patients received INH, RIF, ETB and PZA (four drugs) for three months, then INH and RIF was continued for another six months (two drugs). 18.8%
Short Course Antituberculosis Therapy

Table I. Criteria for steroid therapy

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<th>Criteria</th>
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<tr>
<td>1- Patient in coma or sub-coma</td>
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<td>2- Signs of paralysis</td>
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<td>3- Signs of intracranial hypertension</td>
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<tr>
<td>4- Signs of blockage in CSF channel</td>
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<td>5- TB meningitis + arachnoiditis</td>
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<td>6- C.S.F. protein 4 gr/100 ml or higher</td>
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<td>7- Concomitant brain tuberculoma</td>
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Table II Main Features In 16 Patients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Ages 12-58, Average 30.6</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>62.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
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RESULTS

Main features of the sixteen patients are illustrated in Table II. Age of patients was 12-58 years, with a mean of 30.6 years. Nine patients out of 16 were female and seven were male. Except in two patients whose liver enzymes and blood uric acid serially increased during the second week of therapy, INH was discontinued temporarily and PZA was replaced with streptomycin. In the remaining patients, side effects of drugs, peripheral and other complications were negligible.

The most significant CNS complications that were seen in our patients included paralysis of cranial nerves VI, VII, III, VIII, IX, X, XII and papilledema, optic disc atrophy, hemiplegia and hemiparesis. These complications were seen in 50% of the patients alone or concomitantly. Mortality rate in this study was 25 percent and complete recovery with some CNS deficit was seen in 75% of the patients. All patients were followed for 12-24 months.

We are looking forward to finding more documents about similar studies from other centers (with respect to the lack of such studies at the present time in other institutions).

DISCUSSION

Although tuberculosis is an uncommon disease in some developed countries (with respect to the increasing rate and number of AIDS patients) but in areas with low socio-economical conditions it is a very common infectious disease. On the other hand, the outlook for patients with tuberculous meningitis has gradually changed from certain death to survival with severe disability, to a prospect of full recovery (see Table III for treatment of TB meningitis background).

In the Department of Infectious and Tropical Diseases of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, TB meningitis is the fifth cause of mortality in our hospitalized patients.

The basic requirements of a successful regimen are however very simple. As in any other form of the disease, at least three drugs (even four drugs) must be...
given initially to cope with the possibility and prevent the development of resistant organisms, and also obtain optimal results.

Obviously in patients with TB meningitis, there are two additional requirements, the drugs chosen should cross and continue to cross the blood brain barrier, and treatment should be started early in the disease to prevent or minimize the formation of adhesions (Tables IV, V reflect the ratio of CSF to blood level and properties of some of the main anti-TB preparations).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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REFERENCES: