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Naloxone as an Antagonist in Alcohol Intoxication

To the Editor:—Naloxone is a well-known specific antagonist of endogenous and exogenous opiates.^{1,2} Alcohol intoxication and opiate poisoning have similar effects, and may be related. Alcohol may produce intoxication by liberating endogenous opiates,³ so naloxone therapy may antagonize the effects of alcohol intoxication. Below is a case report of possible antagonism of alcohol intoxication by naloxone.

A 28-year-old man was brought to the Emergency Room because he had fallen, hit his head, and become unconscious, with heavy epistaxis. During the preceding six days he had been drinking heavily; at the same time, he had been taking tranquilizers (oxazepam and chlordiazepoxide). On admission the patient was afebrile. Blood pressure was 130/50 torr, and pulse rate 120 beats/min. Although the lungs had a few rales in both bases, examination of the heart and abdomen disclosed no abnormality. Neurologic examination revealed that the patient was unconscious, with no sign of focalization. The following diagnoses were made: alcohol intoxication, acute brain injury? and nasal contusion. An intravenous infusion was started and nasal tamponade was initiated. Radiographic examination of the head and nasal cavity disclosed no evidence of fracture. Possible aspiration pneumonitis was evident on the chest radiograph. Results of serologic tests were within normal values except for a blood alcohol level of 3.84 g/l.

At 2:20 P.M., the patient was excited and, again, neurologic examination failed to reveal signs of focalization or cerebral damage. About 3:20 P.M., we

believed the case was essentially a case of acute alcohol intoxication. Based in the reports made by Jeffcoate³ and Sørensen,⁴ we decided to try naloxone therapy. At 3:40 P.M., naloxone, 0.4 mg, was given iv, without response. Ten minutes later a second dose of 0.4 mg was given. The patient began to open and close his eyes. At 4:00 P.M. he awakened, called his wife, and asked several relevant questions. An hour later he was still fully awake, conscious and without excitation.

To our knowledge, naloxone is a pure narcotic antagonist. Assuming alcohol produces intoxication by liberating endogenous opiates, we think naloxone therapy should be kept in mind in cases of alcohol intoxication.

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