

Pancreas Transplantation for Patients With Type 1 Diabetes

AMERICAN DIABETES ASSOCIATION

This position statement presents the recommendations of the American Diabetes Association on pancreas transplantation in patients with type 1 diabetes. The recommendations are based on the American Diabetes Association's technical review on "Pancreas and Islet Transplantation for Patients With Diabetes Mellitus," which should be consulted for further information (1).

Successful pancreas transplantation has been demonstrated to be efficacious in significantly improving the quality of life of people with diabetes, primarily by eliminating the need for exogenous insulin, frequent daily blood glucose measurements, and many of the dietary restrictions imposed by the disorder. Transplantation can also eliminate the acute complications commonly experienced by patients with type 1 diabetes (e.g., hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia). Pancreas transplantation is only partially successful in reversing the long-term renal and neural complications of diabetes. However, this procedure is usually performed after 20 years of established diabetes. No data are available to determine whether transplantation earlier in the course of the disease would prevent complications, as would be anticipated given the results of the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial.

Pancreas-only transplants require lifelong immunosuppression to prevent rejection of the graft and potential recurrence of the autoimmune process that might again destroy pancreatic islet cells. Immunosuppressive regimens used in transplant patients have side effects whose frequency

and severity restrict their use to patients who have serious progressive complications of diabetes or whose quality of life is unacceptable. In addition to the side effects of lifelong immunosuppression, the procedure itself has significant morbidity and carries a small, but not negligible, risk of mortality. It is not known whether the mortality rate exceeds that inherent in the patient population that has undergone pancreas transplantation, i.e., patients with more than 20 years of chronic diabetes who have extreme swings in glycemia, overt diabetic complications, and poor quality of life.

Pancreas or islet transplantations should be performed in tertiary care centers that have an active kidney transplant program and are equipped to adequately handle the complex medical and psychosocial needs of transplant patients over the long term.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Pancreas transplantation should be considered an acceptable therapeutic alternative to continued insulin therapy in diabetic patients with imminent or established end-stage renal disease who have had or plan to have a kidney transplant, because the successful addition of a pancreas does not jeopardize patient survival, may improve kidney survival, and will restore normal glycemia. Such patients also must meet the medical indications and criteria for kidney transplantation and not have excessive surgical risk for the dual transplant pro-

cedure. Medicare and other third-party payers of medical care should include coverage for pancreas transplant procedures meeting these criteria. The pancreas transplant may be done simultaneous with, or subsequent to, a kidney transplant. Pancreas graft survival is better when done simultaneously with a kidney transplant.

2. In the absence of indications for kidney transplantation, pancreas transplantation should only be considered a therapy in patients who exhibit these three criteria: 1) a history of frequent, acute, and severe metabolic complications (hypoglycemia, hyperglycemia, ketoacidosis) requiring medical attention; 2) clinical and emotional problems with exogenous insulin therapy that are so severe as to be incapacitating; and 3) consistent failure of insulin-based management to prevent acute complications. Program guidelines for ensuring an objective multidisciplinary evaluation of the patient's condition and eligibility for transplantation should be established and followed. Third-party payer coverage is appropriate only where such guidelines and procedures exist.
3. Pancreatic islet cell transplants hold significant potential advantages over whole-gland transplants. However, at this time, islet cell transplantation is an experimental procedure, also requiring systemic immunosuppression, and should be performed only within the setting of controlled research studies.

References

1. Robertson RP, Davis C, Larsen J, Stratta R, Sutherland DER: Pancreas and islet transplantation for patients with diabetes mellitus (Technical Review). *Diabetes Care* 23:112-116, 2000

The recommendations in this paper are based on the evidence reviewed in the following publication: Robertson RP, Davis C, Larsen J, Stratta R, Sutherland DER: Pancreas and islet transplantation for patients with diabetes (Technical Review). *Diabetes Care* 23:112-116, 2000.

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