Letters

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Update on reintroduction of epoetin in a patient with pure red cell aplasia

Sir,

A recent review of recombinant human erythropoietin (rHuEPO)-associated pure red cell aplasia (PRCA) cautioned re-challenge with the same or alternative rHuEPO products in the face of continued anaemia in patients with end-stage renal failure [1]. The mainstay of treatment should involve withdrawal of epoetin therapy, immunosuppression and supportive correction of anaemia with blood transfusion. Whilst epoetin re-challenge can be attempted, caution is advised in the face of reported relapse, even with an alternative rHuEPO [2].

Our unit initially reported the case of an 81-year-old man who developed PRCA with positive anti-EPO antibodies whilst on subcutaneous epoetin-alpha in May 2002 [3]. His epoetin was discontinued, and following the 4-month treatment with cyclosporin his anti-EPO antibodies became negative. He became transfusion dependent and after a further 9 months the decision was made to restart him on alternative EPO therapy because of persistent anaemia. He was commenced on darbepoetin and had a successful response to therapy. He remained on cyclosporin throughout this time although subsequent withdrawal had been discussed. The patient chose to remain on cyclosporin as he had suffered no adverse effects. This was one of the first reports of the successful reintroduction of rHuEPO in a patient with PRCA. He remained well and transfusion independent with a haemoglobin level between 10.5 and 11.5 g/dL for 4 years. He subsequently died, aged 84, following complications after a fractured neck of femur. To date there are no reports of any patients having tolerated reintroduction of epoetin following PRCA for a longer duration.

This case illustrates the potential benefits, and safety, of long-term immunosuppressant therapy supporting the reintroduction of rHuEPO following PRCA.

Conflicts of interest statement. None declared.

(See related article by S. Summers et al. The (re)challenging question of erythropoiesis-stimulating agents inducing pure red cell aplasia. Nephrol Dial Transplant 2008; 23: 3053–3055.)

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PD underutilization in Europe: a call to action

Sir,

We read with interest the editorial comment by Van Biesen et al. [1] regarding the detailed list of factors leading to peritoneal dialysis (PD) underutilization in Europe. However, as we ‘cannot teach an old dog new tricks’, all our effort should focus on the training of the renal fellows around Europe. Most of them can easily say by heart all the contraindications (haemodialysis has none!) and complications (mainly peritonitis!) of PD, but barely a few of its advantages.

More than two-thirds of incident ESRD patients do not have medical contraindications for either haemodialysis (HD) or PD, but the vast majority starts HD [2] and this situation will become worse, as young nephrologists usually do not feel very confident with the modality. Not only in the USA [3], but also in many European countries and Greece, a lot of medical centres with nephrology training programs do not treat enough (or have no PD patients!), or devote not enough time for renal fellows in order to develop expertise in the care of PD patients. Most of the PD training is based mainly on the complications the fellow will face in the nephrology wards. So, the new nephrologist will remain with the bad experiences of resistant, or sclerosing encapsulating peritonitis and severe fluid overload. Successful PD and patients’ real satisfaction with the modality can be appreciated only in the PD outpatient clinic.

Selecting PD is a complex situation for the ESRD patient, who might be aware of HD or transplantation of course, but almost never of PD! The ‘hidden curriculum’ in the society and the ‘hidden persuaders’ in the medical community will always be in favour of HD. The fake dilemma regarding the best modality for ESRD (HD or PD?) should be terminated as soon as possible. The modern nephrologist should be wise enough to recognize the possible contraindications of each modality and confident enough to offer both of them to the right patient. Offering HD to a patient who stays 100 km away from the nearest HD unit sounds equally ridiculous to offering PD in an obese, anuric octogenarian without any assistance at home.