CORONAVIRUS PARTICLES IN FÆCES FROM PATIENTS WITH GASTROENTERITIS

SIR,—In an explosive outbreak of gastroenteritis in 23 of 500 Service apprentices aged 16 to 20 years, specimens of fæces from 9 patients were examined by electron microscopy. Typical coronavirus particles were seen in the fæces of 2 of the patients, in 1 in very large numbers. Coronavirus-like particles were seen in 1 patient, that they were so abundant that it could not be concluded that they were virus particles identical to those reported from the countries listed above. Coronaviruses virus being an important aetiological agent in children with acute enteritis. They stated that this virus had been identified in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, Rhodesia, India, Norway, territory of Papua/New Guinea, and in widely separated Australian aborigine communities, and in the U.S.A.

New Zealand can now be added to the list. Recently, fæcal samples from three children admitted to Wakari Hospital (Dunedin) with acute enteritis were airmailed to Melbourne for examination. Two of these contained virus particles identical to those reported from the countries listed above.

I am indebted to Dr Ruth Bishop and her colleagues for undertaking examination of these samples.

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CLINICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF HBAg SUBTYPES D AND Y IN ACUTE VIRAL HEPATITIS B

SIR,—The clinical significance of the hepatitis-B surface antigen (HBAg) subtypes D and Y in HBAg-positive liver diseases is still unknown. Different subtype distribution in patients with acute and chronic liver diseases and healthy carriers has been demonstrated by several authors, and it was concluded that the HBAg subtypes D and Y are of clinical significance. If the clinical course of an HBAg-positive acute viral hepatitis is determined by the HBAg subtype, clinical differences in the two forms of hepatitis B should be expected.

Laboratory data in 29 cases (15 men, 14 women; mean age 36·5 ± 15·0 years) of acute viral hepatitis B of subtype D were compared with 38 cases (17 men, 21 women; mean age 30·0 ±14·0 years) of subtype Y. Subtyping was performed by a radioimmunoassay using antibody of the specificity anti-a, anti-d, and anti-y. For statistical analysis U-test and χ²-test were performed.

No differences were found in prothrombin-time, serum-glutamic-oxaloacetic transaminase, serum-glutamic-pyruvic transaminase, bilirubin, alkaline phosphatase, total protein, alpha-1, alpha-2, beta, and gammaglobulins, or in immunoglobulins IgG, IgA, and IgM measured at the beginning, during, and at discharge from hospital. HB antigenemia and length of stay in hospital were equal in both groups.

These findings support the hypothesis that the subtypes D and Y in acute HBAg-positive viral hepatitis have no significance for the clinical course of the disease.

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HBAg SUBTYPES IN GLOMERULONEPHRITIS

SIR,—In 71 cases of glomerulonephritis with immune deposits, Conté and Fournié 1 found no traces of HBAg in the serum but found it in 31% of renal-biopsy samples. However, in 161 patients with glomerulonephritis with immune deposits we found HBAg in the serum in 6·8% cases, compared with 0·54% in other forms of primitive glomerulonephritis and in normal subjects 2; that percentage proved to be even higher when we used the radioimmunoassay as well as counterimmunoelectrophoresis. The results lately given by Pedreira and his colleagues 3 are similar to ours: of 105 patients with chronic glomerulonephritis reviewed the evidence for a new virus being an important aetiological agent in children with acute enteritis. They stated that this virus had been identified in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, Rhodesia, India, Norway, territory of Papua/New Guinea, Malaysia, in widely separated Australian aborigine communities, and in the U.S.A.


DUOVIRUS IN NEW ZEALAND

SIR,—Davidson et al. 1 reviewed the evidence for a new virus being an important aetiological agent in children with acute enteritis. They stated that this virus had been identified in Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, Singapore, Rhodesia, India, Norway, territory of Papua/New Guinea, Malaysia, in widely separated Australian aborigine communities, and in the U.S.A.