Correspondence

Retinoids and hyperostosis

Sir, The article by van Dooren-Greebe et al. requires clarification. The authors indicate that 77 of their subjects were treated with synthetic retinoids for psoriasis but give no indication how many of these subjects also had evidence of psoriatic arthritis or psoriatic spondylitis. Nor is it clear how many of the patients having baseline X-rays had psoriasis.

This is important for two reasons:
1. If none of the 77 patients with psoriasis had psoriatic arthropathy or spondylitis, it is possible the survey has excluded a population of patients susceptible to retinoid-induced spinal abnormalities.
2. The radiographic changes of psoriatic spondylitis may be indistinguishable from DISH and retinoid-induced hyperostosis. As the radiologist was 'unaware of details from the patients records', there is the possibility of misinterpretation of spinal findings.

Perhaps the authors could look again at their data with particular reference to psoriatic arthritis and spondylitis.

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References

Is methotrexate liver toxicity modest worldwide?

Sir, I read with interest the article of Dr M.J. Boffa et al. on methotrexate (MTX) liver toxicity in psoriasis. MTX has been neglected for years in Italy because of an overemphasized fear of liver toxicity. The reappraisal is therefore welcome. However, how can a study on liver toxicity be performed without any evaluation of previous hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection? As far as I am aware, no studies on MTX liver toxicity have investigated the interaction HCV infection. HCV infected patients may have neither symptoms nor elevation of liver enzymes yet still have chronic active hepatitis. Transaminases which may pass unnoticed. In such patients, introduction of a toxic and immunosuppressive drug like MTX may reactivate the virus and increase liver toxicity.

Actually, as HCV infection in Dr Boffa’s geographical area affects only 0.04% of blood donors, none of his patients was likely to be HCV positive. However, lack of information about HCV status, does not permit optimistic conclusions about MTX safety that may not be shared in countries with higher HCV prevalence than the U.K.

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References