Low incidence of spontaneous bacterial peritonitis in asymptomatic cirrhotic outpatients

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Author contributions: Cadranel JF and Nousbaum JB equally contributed to this work; Cadranel JF, Nousbaum JB, Silvain C, Pauwels A and Tran A designed the study; Bessaguet C analyzed the data; Cadranel JF and Nousbaum JB wrote the paper; Cadranel JF, Nousbaum JB, Nahon P, Nguyen-Khac E, Moreau

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Received: July 4, 2012 Revised: September 24, 2012 Accepted: November 14, 2012 Published online: March 27, 2013

Abstract

AIM: To compare the incidence of spontaneous bacterial peritonitis in cirrhotic outpatients and inpatients undergoing therapeutic paracentesis

METHODS: From January 1 to May 31, 2004, 1041 patients from 70 different hospitals underwent 2123 therapeutic abdominal paracentesis (AP) performed as an outpatient procedure in 355 and as inpatient procedure in 686 cases respectively. The following parameters were compared prospectively between outpatients and inpatients: spontaneous bacterial peritonitis (SBP) prevalence, age, gender, cause of cirrhosis, symptoms, score and grade according to Child-Pugh classification, cirrhosis complications, antibiotics treatment, serum creatinine, platelet count and ascitic protein concentration.

RESULTS: SBP was observed in 91 patients. In the whole population the SBP prevalence was 8.7% (95%CI: 7.2-10.6) it was 11.7% (95%CI: 9.5-14.3) in inpatients and 3.1% (95%CI: 1.7-5.5) in outpatients (P < 0.00001). SBP prevalence was 8.3% (95%CI: 4.3-15.6) in symptomatic outpatients vs 1.2% (95%CI: 0.4-3.4) in asymptomatic outpatients (P < 0.002). Patients undergoing outpatient AP were significantly different from...
INTRODUCTION

Therapeutic abdominal paracentesis (AP) is the recommended treatment for patients with ascites resistant or refractory to medical treatment[1]. Many cirrhotic patients with ascites are regularly hospitalized for AP. Good clinical practice guidelines of the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases[2] recommend performing ascitic fluid analysis in association with AP in order to search for two serious complications: bacterial peritonitis and neutrocytic ascites[3]. However, except in cases where infection is suspected, the usefulness of this approach is not clearly established in outpatients. Indeed several retrospective and prospective studies have shown that spontaneous bacterial peritonitis (SBP) is very rare or even absent in outpatients[4-10]. These data are probably related to differences in demographic data and liver diseases severity and/or characteristics of ascitic fluid between inpatients and outpatients. However such probable differences have not been properly studied. The present study is ancillary to the prospective multicenter study of the usefulness of Multistix® strip for the detection of SBP already published[11]. The aims were to compare the incidence of SBP in outpatients and inpatients undergoing AP and to look for factors associated with low SBP prevalence in outpatients (if these data were confirmed).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Patients

The present study is a retrospective analysis of data from a prospective study involving all consecutive cirrhotic patients with ascites, undergoing therapeutic abdominal paracentesis (AP) followed from January 1 to May 31, 2004 in 70 French participating centers. This prospective study involved all consecutive cirrhotic patients with ascites, undergoing therapeutic abdominal paracentesis (AP) followed from January 1 to May 31, 2004 in 70 French participating centers. This prospective study involved all consecutive cirrhotic patients with ascites, undergoing therapeutic abdominal paracentesis (AP) followed from January 1 to May 31, 2004 in 70 French participating centers. This prospective study involved all consecutive cirrhotic patients with ascites, undergoing therapeutic abdominal paracentesis (AP) followed from January 1 to May 31, 2004 in 70 French participating centers. 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RESULTS

One thousand and forty one cirrhotic patients with ascites, undergoing therapeutic paracentesis (AP) were studied. A total of 2123 paracenteses were performed. The procedure was performed as an outpatient procedure in 355 cases (34.1%) and in hospitalized patients (inpatients) in 686 cases (65.9%). The main characteristics of the patients are shown in Table 1; cirrhosis was related with alcohol in 686 cases (65.9%) and to several causes in 5% (Table 1).

Data concerning Multistix® performance for the SBP diagnosis have been published elsewhere and will not be described here[10]. One hundred and seventeen SBP were observed in 91 out of 1041 patients undergoing 2123 paracenteses. Cultures were positive in 56 patients. SBP incidence was 8.7% (95%CI: 7.2-10.6) in the whole population, 11.7% (95%CI: 9.5-14.3) in inpatients and 3.1% (95%CI: 1.7-5.5) in outpatients (P < 0.0001). SBP incidence was 8.3% (95%CI: 4.3-15.6) in symptomatic outpatients vs 1.2% (95%CI: 0.4-3.4) in asymptomatic outpatients (P < 0.002).

Patients undergoing AP as an outpatient procedure differed significantly from those undergoing inpatient AP (Table 2); outpatients were older (61.1 ± 11.1 vs 59.4 ± 11.7 years, P = 0.028), cause of cirrhosis was less often alcohol (83.7% vs 88.2%; P < 0.001), Child-Pugh score was lower (mean score was 8.9 vs 10.1; P < 0.001) and more often B than C (63.7% vs 38%, P < 0.001).

In addition, in outpatients the platelet count was higher [161 ± 93 × 10⁶ cells/mL vs 143 ± 89 × 10⁶ cells/mL; P = 0.003], serum total bilirubin concentration was lower (38.2 ± 60.7 µmol/L vs 96.3 ± 143.3 µmol/L, P < 0.0001), and ascitic protein concentration was higher (17.9 ± 10.9 g/L vs 14.5 ± 10.9 g/L; P < 0.001) than in inpatients (Table 2).

DISCUSSION

In this study, 1041 cirrhotic patients underwent 2123 paracenteses with ascitic fluid analysis and two Multistix 8 SG strip determination[11]. Eighty percent of the patients had alcoholic cirrhosis and 44.2% were stage C cirrhosis according to the Child-Pugh classification. The incidence of SBP in asymptomatic outpatients was 1.2%. Our study thus confirms the low incidence of SBP in outpatients considered as asymptomatic according to well-defined clinical criteria[8,9]. In the two studies published in abstract form only, the incidence of SBP in outpatients was 0% in the first study (78 paracenteses performed in 26 patients)[9] and 0% in the second (173 paracenteses study performed in 51 patients)[7]. In the 4 studies published as peer-reviewed articles, including a paracenteses number ranging from 118 to 427, the incidence of SBP ranged from 0% to 3.5% (Table 3). In addition, Runyon[8] recently reported a 2% incidence of SBP in a series of 400 paracenteses performed in two years in an outpatient setting. In a study performed by one of the coauthors

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Table 1 Characteristics of the 1041 patients who underwent diagnostic or therapeutic paracentesis

| Characteristics                                      | Outpatients | Inpatients | P value |
|------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| Male, n (%)                                           | 748 (71.9)  | 427        |         |
| Age (yr), mean (range)                                | 60 (25-93)  | 40 (16.5-53)|       |
| Median number of paracenteses                         | 2           | 0          |         |
| Cause of cirrhosis, n (%)                             |             |            |         |
| Alcohol                                              | 840 (80.7)  | 52 (9)     |         |
| Alcohol + viral hepatitis (B or C)                   | 52 (9)      | 0          |         |
| Viral hepatitis                                      | 88 (8.4)    | 88.2       |         |
| Hemochromatosis                                      | 6 (0.6)     | 6 (0.6)    |         |
| Others                                                | 55 (5.3)    | 61.1 ± 11.1|         |
| Child-Pugh score, n (%)                               |             |            |         |
| A                                                     | 0           | 0          |         |
| B                                                     | 470 (45.2)  | 470 (45.2) |         |
| C                                                     | 571 (54.8)  | 571 (54.8) |         |
| Prothrombin time (%), median (range)                  | 52 (20-85)  | 52 (20-85) |         |
| Serum bilirubin (µmol/L), median (range)              | 30 (10-842) | 38.2 ± 6.7 |         |
| Albumin (g/L), median (range)                         | 29 (16.5-53)| 30 (10-842) |       |
| Platelet count (10⁶ cells/mL), median (range)         | 130 (15-684)| 130 (15-684)|     |
| Serum creatinine (µmol/L), median (range)             | 80 (22-474)| 80 (22-474) |       |

Statistical analysis

The following parameters were compared between outpatients and inpatients: SBP prevalence, age, gender, cause of cirrhosis, symptoms, score and grade according to Child-Pugh classification, cirrhosis complications, antibiotics treatment, serum creatinine, platelet count and ascitic protein concentration.

Statistical analysis was performed using the SPSS package (SPSS Inc., Chicago, United States). Results were expressed as mean and standard deviation with range unless specified otherwise. Quantitative characteristics (age, bilirubin, platelet count, etc.) were compared between the two patients populations by Student’s t test. Depending on the qualitative characteristics (cause of cirrhosis, Child-Pugh score, etc.) proportional differences between the two populations were studied by χ² test.

Table 2 Comparison between outpatients and inpatients

|             | Outpatients | Inpatients | P value |
|-------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| Age (yr)    | 61.1 ± 11.1 | 59.4 ± 11.7| < 0.03  |
| Alcohol (%) | 83.7        | 88.2       | < 0.001 |
| Child-Pugh score (mean) | 8.9 | 10.1 | < 0.001 |
| Child-Pugh score B vs C (%) | 63.7/36.3 | 38.0/62.0 | < 0.001 |
| Bilirubin (µmol/L) | 38.2 ± 6.7 | 96.3 ± 143.3 | < 0.0001 |
| Platelets (10⁶ cells/mL) | 161 ± 93 | 143 ± 89 | < 0.003 |
| Ascitic protein concentration (g/L) | 17.9 ± 10.9 | 14.5 ± 10.9 | < 0.001 |

Table 3 Prevalence of spontaneous bacterial peritonitis in asymptomatic outpatients in main published series

| Ref.                | No. of patients | No. of paracenteses | Prevalence of spontaneous bacterial peritonitis |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Jeffries et al[1]   | 29              | 118                  | 0 (0%)                                          |
| Evans et al[4]      | 427             | 427                  | 15 (3.5%)                                       |
| Romney et al[6]     | 67              | 270                  | 0 (0%)                                          |
| Castellote et al[8] | 40              | 204                  | 1 (0.5%)                                        |
| Present study       | 355             | 976                  | 1.2                                             |

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March 27, 2013 | Volume 5 | Issue 3 |
of this study, including more than 500 paracenteses of ascitic fluid in cirrhotic ascitic patients on long-term ofloxacin treatment, the incidence of bacterial peritonitis was zero[6]. In their retrospective study of 427 cirrhotic patients seen in a single outpatient clinic, Evans et al[5] analyzed 427 exploratory paracenteses performed over a 6-year period. Their exclusion criteria were similar to those used by Jeffries et al[8]; however patients receiving primary or secondary prophylaxis with norfloxacin were excluded. The incidence of SBP in the study performed by Evans et al[5] was 1.4% and that of neutrocytic ascites was 2.1% (giving a combined incidence of 3.5%). In the prospective multicenter study of Romney et al[19] the incidence of SBP was nil and it was 0.5% in the recent study of Castellote et al[16] (Table 3). The incidence of SBP in asymptomatic outpatients found in our large prospective multicenter study was thus comparable to that of these 4 studies[5,8-10]. Our data confirm on a large scale that asymptomatic outpatients have a very low or even null risk of SBP. Although in our study the incidence of SBP in asymptomatic outpatients was less than 1.5%, it rose to more than 8% when symptoms and signs of infection were present underlining the validity of the criteria of Jeffries et al[8] and Romney et al[19]. When considering the whole population of outpatients, the incidence of SBP remained however significantly lower than that of inpatients ($P < 10^{-5}$). Although the reasons for such differences in SBP incidence between inpatients and outpatients are probably related to differences in demographic data and liver diseases severity and/or characteristics of ascitic fluid between inpatients and outpatients, these data had not been studied in previously published series. In the present study, outpatients differed significantly from inpatients: cause of cirrhosis was less often alcohol, Child-Pugh score was lower and ascitic protein concentration was higher. platelet count was higher, serum total bilirubin concentration was significantly lower; in addition, ascitic protein concentration was higher. platelet count was higher, serum total bilirubin concentration was significantly lower and ascitic protein concentration was higher.

**Applications**

The study results suggest that exploratory paracentesis could be avoided in most cases of asymptomatic cirrhotic outpatients, according to well-defined clinical criteria.

**Peer review**

The question is not new and results were rather predictable, however few actual results were available in the literature. Statistical differences occur even in the presence of small numerical differences because of the large number of patients. Nevertheless the substantial sample is in itself a bonus and therefore findings should be accepted.

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