Cancer in mice: effects of prednisolone or mepacrine alone and with cytotoxic drugs

A. Bennett, P.B. Melhuish, S. Patel, H. Randles & I.F. Stamford

Department of Surgery, King's College School of Medicine and Dentistry, The Rayne Institute, 123 Coldharbour Lane, London SE5 9NU, UK.

Summary WHT/Ht mice were transplanted s.c. with NC carcinoma, and the tumours were excised after 2 weeks. The mice were treated orally throughout the experiments with prednisolone 500μg kg⁻¹ or mepacrine 3.6mg kg⁻¹, starting the day after tumour transplantation or, with prednisolone, the day after tumour excision. In some experiments the mice were also treated with the cytotoxic drugs methotrexate 2mg kg⁻¹ and melphalan 1.4mg kg⁻¹. The excised tumours were weighed; some of them, and samples of serum, were extracted for prostanoïds which were measured by radioimmunoassay. The chemotherapy lengthened the survival of the mice, but prednisolone or mepacrine had little or no effect on survival, metastasis, the response to chemotherapy, tumour size or the formation of tumour prostanoïds.

Prostaglandin synthesis inhibitors have been extensively investigated in various murine cancers, and they usually show a beneficial effect (Bennett, 1982; 1986). In the NC tumour model the prostaglandin synthesis inhibitors indomethacin or flurbiprofen increase mouse survival and usually reduce tumour size. Survival is even longer when these nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs are used with the cytotoxic drugs methotrexate and melphalan (Bennett et al., 1982). The effects of the anti-inflammatory drugs seem likely to result from inhibition of prostaglandin synthesis rather than from other properties that the drugs may have (Flower, 1974), since administration of a PGE₁ analogue counteracted the effect of indomethacin (Bennett et al., 1985). A similar effect might therefore be expected with other drugs that reduce prostaglandin formation, such as corticosteroids and mepacrine which can inhibit phospholipase activity and so depress the release of prostaglandin precursors (Vane et al., 1982). This action may be particularly relevant to human cancers since prednisolone is frequently used in chemotherapy regimens. We have therefore studied the effects of prednisolone and mepacrine, alone and in combination with the cytotoxic drugs methotrexate and melphalan, in mice with NC tumours. Measurements were made of tumour weight and prostanoïd content, the occurrence of metastases, and mouse survival.

Materials and methods

The original NC tumour arose spontaneously in the mammary region of a WHT/Ht mouse (Hewitt et al., 1976) and has since been passaged only in this strain. It has a high incidence of local lymphatic spread, recurrence in the scar following tumour excision, and metastasis mainly to the lungs and mediastinum.

On day 0, male or female WHT/Ht mice were injected s.c. into the left flank with ~10⁶ NC carcinoma cells in a single-cell suspension from passaged tumours as described previously (Bennett et al., 1979, 1982). All tumours were excised at 2 weeks and weighed. The study consisted of 6 separate experiments, each with 9–15 WHT/Ht mice/group. Drugs were given orally in 0.1 ml 50% syrup BP for 5 days (Monday to Friday) each week, and treatment with prednisolone or mepacrine was continued until death or the end of the experiment (day 121). The doses chosen are approximately the highest recommended amounts for man.

In experiments 1 and 2, prednisolone 500μg kg⁻¹ (or vehicle for controls) were given daily from day 1 (the day after tumour inoculation) to female mice. In experiment 2, methotrexate 2mg kg⁻¹ and melphalan 1.4mg kg⁻¹ were given on days 15–17, 22–24, 29–31 with or without prednisolone.

In experiments 3 and 4, prednisolone 500μg kg⁻¹ or vehicle were given daily from day 15 (the day after tumour excision) to female mice. In experiment 4, methotrexate and melphalan were given with prednisolone or vehicle as above. Experiments 5 and 6 were with male mice given mepacrine hydrochloride 3.6mg kg⁻¹ from day 1, alone or with methotrexate and melphalan as above. There was no rationale concerning the sex of the mice. We used what was available, but kept to the same sex in each study.

In studies where drug treatment began on day 1, some tumours were homogenised in acid-ethanol (Krebs solution acidified to ~pH3 with formic acid, and mixed with an equal volume of ethanol). Homogenisation in this solution gives ‘basal’ amounts of prostaglandins (Bennett et al., 1973). After extraction (Unger et al., 1971), PGE, 6-keto-PGF₁α and TXB₂ were measured by radioimmunoassay (Hennam et al., 1974). The % cross-reactivities of the antibodies were as follows. PGE antibody (Miles Scientific): PGE₁, 100; PGE₂, 53; PGF₂α, 10; PGA₂, 2.7; PFG₂, 2.6; PGB₁, 1.5; PGA₁, 1.4; PGB₂, 0.9. 6-Keto-PGF₁α antibody (Wellcome Research Laboratories): 6-keto-PGF₁α, 100; PGE₂, 3.0; PGE₁, 0.1; TXB₂, 0.2. TXB₂ antibody: TXB₂, 100; PGF₂α, 0.11; 6keto-PGF₁α, 0.01; PGE₂ <0.01. Intra- and inter-assay coefficients of variation were respectively 10–11% and 15–21% and the lower limits of detection were (pg per 100μg) PGE₁ 15.6; 6-keto-PGF₁α 12.5; TXB₂ 7.8. The tritiated compounds, obtained from Amersham International, had the following specific activities (TBq mmol⁻¹): PGE₂, 5.92; 6keto-PGF₁α, 5.55; TXB₂, 6.66. The bound and unbound compounds were separated by adding 1ml of cold (4°C) ammonium sulphate/calcium sulphate (65% saturated ammonium sulphate solution pH 7.6 + calcium sulphate 1g per 25ml, maintained as an even suspension with a magnetic stirrer).

The mice were weighed twice weekly from at least 2 weeks prior to the start of the experiment up to death or day 121. Those with advanced carcinomatosis were killed humanely to prevent suffering (Bennett et al., 1982). Survival time was measured from the day of tumour inoculation, and analysed by the method of Lee and Desu (1972). The incidences of recurrence in the excision scar, lymph nodes and or distant sites were noted at postmortem, and analysed by Fisher’s exact test.

In another experiment, using 8 normal female mice/group, we investigated the effects of mepacrine 3.6mg kg⁻¹ or prednisolone 500μg kg⁻¹ on serum prostanoïds. The mice were dosed daily for 2 days with drug or vehicle, and...
anaesthetised with ether 2 h after the final dose. Blood was obtained by cardiac puncture and incubated at 37°C for 30 min to allow formation of TXB₂ during clotting. After centrifugation (1500 g, 4°C for 10 min), the serum was removed and stored at -20°C prior to radioimmunoassay of the unextracted samples for PGE₂, 6-keto-PGF₁α and TXB₂.

Results

Tumour weight, spread and host survival

All transplanted tumours became palpable within 10 days. The weights of the tumours excised from mice treated from day 1 with prednisolone (experiments 1 and 2) were similar to the controls, being respectively 370 (240–440) mg n=30, and 300 (250–400) mg n=30, P>0.2 (Mann–Whitney U-test). The weights of tumours from mice treated from day 1 with mepacrine (experiments 5 and 6) were also similar to controls, being respectively 240 (80–460) mg n=45, and 230 (120–380) mg n=43, P>0.8.

Neither prednisolone nor mepacrine improved mouse survival, regardless of whether treatment was started after the tumour was transplanted or excised. In fact, mice treated with prednisolone from day 1 (experiments 1 and 2) fared worse than the controls (P<0.04, Lee & Desu 1972; Table I). Cytotoxic chemotherapy alone (methotrexate and melphalan) improved survival, but this was not affected by combination with prednisolone or mepacrine (Table I). Figure 1 shows survival curves for mice given prednisolone 500 µg kg⁻¹ from day 1 (experiments 1 and 2).

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Figure 1** Treatment with the cytotoxic drugs methotrexate and melphalan (Cyto) increased the survival time of mice with resected NC tumours (P=0.016, Lee & Desu, 1972). Prednisolone 500 µg kg⁻¹ (Drug) given from day 1, the day after tumour transplantation, seemed to shorten the survival time (experiments 5 and 6), but it did not affect the response to the cytotoxic drugs (Drug + cyto).

The postmortem findings showed mainly similar incidences of recurrence in the excision scar, lymph nodes and lungs in the different treatment groups. The lack of effect on metastasis in mice given chemotherapy is not surprising, since they lived longer and had more time for tumour to spread, grow and eventually kill them.

Tumour prostanoids

The median tumour yield of 6-keto-PGF₁α (mice treated from day 1 with prednisolone) was 36% less than controls (P<0.1; experiment I). In the mepacrine-treated mice (experiment 6) the median tumour PGE₂ and TXB₂ were respectively 38% and 25% less then controls (both P<0.1). The other tumour prostanoid measurements were similar to controls (Table II). PGE₂ was the predominant tumour prostanoid (medians for control males and females respectively 214 and 150 ng g⁻¹; Table II).

Serum prostanoids

The serum contained more TXB₂ than PGE or 6-keto-PGF₁α. In mice given prednisolone, the median amount of serum TXB₂ was 86% greater than control (P=0.04) whereas 6-keto-PGF₁α was 84% lower (P=0.01); the PGE was little changed (Table III). Mepacrine-treated mice also had less 6-keto-PGF₁α (median 74% lower than control, P=0.04), but the other prostanoids were little affected.

Discussion

As reported previously (Bennett et al., 1982; 1985), chemotherapy with methotrexate and melphalan increased the survival of mice with resected NC tumours. We started these experiments in the expectation that prednisolone and mepacrine would act as phospholipase inhibitors, thereby lowering prostaglandin production and mimicking the beneficial effect of cyclooxygenase inhibitors in mice with NC tumours (Bennett et al., 1979; 1982). Lynch et al. (1978) found that indomethacin, aspirin or hydrocortisone increased the survival of mice with methylcholanthrene-induced tumours, although only the nonsteroids significantly reduced the tumour size. Inhibition of prostaglandin synthesis appears to explain the antitumour effect of indomethacin on the NC cancer, since a stable PGE₂ analogue counteracted the increase in survival (Bennett et al., 1985). However, in the present experiments prednisolone or mepacrine had little or no effect on the cancer or its response to the cytotoxic drugs. An explanation for this lack of anticancer activity may be that although the doses/kg of prednisolone and mepacrine are near the maximum used in man, they caused at most a weak inhibition of prostaglandin formation by the mouse tumours. Furthermore, although they reduced the amount of 6-keto-PGF₁α in serum from normal mice, the PGE seemed

| Drug     | Day treated | Controls | Drug-treated | CT        | Drug + CT |
|----------|-------------|----------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| Prednisolone | D1  | 39 (36-43) | 37 (33-38) | 45 (42-46)a | 48 (42-52) |
| 500 µg kg⁻¹ | n=19 | n=19     | n=10        | n=10      | n=10      |
| Prednisolone | D15 | 37 (35-40) | 38 (35-44) | 51 (51-55)b | 49 (47-53) |
| 500 µg kg⁻¹ | n=19 | n=20     | n=10        | n=10      | n=10      |
| Mepacrine | D1  | 41 (38-50) | 39 (34-49) | 52 (45-55)c | 51 (47-64) |
| 3.6 mg kg⁻¹ | n=23 | n=23     | n=17        | n=18      |           |

Prednisolone given from day 1 (D1, experiments 1 and 2) or day 15 (D15, experiments 3 and 4) or mepacrine from D1 (experiments 5 and 6) had little or no effect on mouse survival (Lee & Desu, 1972). The results are days, shown as medians with semiquartile ranges in parentheses. Survival was lengthened by chemotherapy (CT) with methotrexate and melphalan, but addition of prednisolone or mepacrine did not affect the response to CT.

P values: a = 0.02 (experiment 2); b < 0.005 (experiment 4); c < 0.0005 (experiments 5 and 6).
to be unaffected and the amount of TXB₂ was actually greater. Rittenhouse-Simmons and Deykin (1981) considered that failure of platelets to synthesise new protein explains why their prostanoid formation is not blocked by corticosteroids. However, this may not be correct since there is some evidence that platelets can incorporate amino acids into protein (Shaw et al., 1984).

The possibility that the doses were too low to affect extravascular prostanoid formation prompted us to study prednisolone 0.5–15 mg kg⁻¹ or mepacrine 3.6–28.8 mg kg⁻¹ given orally to normal mice for 3 days. These doses had little or no effect on the amounts of PGE, 6-keto-PGF₁α or TXB₂ extracted from intestine homogenised in acid-ethanol (unpublished). Although this seems to be contrary to current thinking (Vane et al., 1982), various groups have reported that in vivo or with intact cells in vitro corticosteroids did not affect prostaglandin synthesis. For example there was no effect of dexamethasone on the amount of peritoneal prostaglandins in rats (Deraedt et al., 1980), or on prostaglandin formation by rat polymorphonuclear leucocytes (Dray et al., 1980). In patients given 6α-methyl-prednisolone the concentrations of prostanoids in synovial effusions were variably affected: 6-keto-PGF₁α fell by 35% and PGF₂α increased by 30%, while PGE₂ and TXB₂ were unchanged (Bombardieri et al., 1981). The latter results, and our findings with mouse serum, suggest that the effects of prednisolone and mepacrine are more like those expected of a PGI₂ synthetase inhibitor than a phospholipase A² inhibitor, there being in general less 6-keto-PGF₁α and more TXB₂. Clearly inhibition of prostanoid synthesis by these drugs in vivo does not seem to be a universal occurrence.

According to Honn et al. (1981, 1983), increasing the prostacyclin/thromboxane ratio in blood decreases metastasis by reducing platelet aggregation. Since this ratio decreased with prednisolone or mepacrine, we might have expected the drugs to worsen the cancer. Measurement of blood prostanoids is fraught with difficulties, and furthermore we used serum so that some of the 6-keto-PGF₁α may have originated from PGI₁ formed during clotting. Nevertheless, our findings are weak evidence against Honn’s hypothesis. They are consistent with our finding that the thromboxane synthetase inhibitor dazmegrel reduced mouse serum TXB₂ and increased the 6-keto-PGF₁α, but had no effect on the survival of mice bearing NC tumours (Stamford et al., 1986). Similarly, recent work in breast cancer patients demonstrated that the TXB₂:6-keto-PGF₁α ratio in the systemic circulation is not an indicator of malignancy or metastasis (Nigam et al., 1985).

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Table II Radioimmunoassay of tumour prostanoids

| Treatment | Sex | PGE | 6-Keto-PGF₁α | TXB₂ |
|-----------|-----|-----|-------------|------|
| Controls  | F   | 150 (103–193) | 87 (62–154) | 5 (4–8) |
|           |     | n = 10        | n = 10      | n = 10 |
| 500 μg kg⁻¹ prednisolone | F   | 102 (94–141) | 56 (62–68) | 4 (3–5) |
|           |     | n = 10        | n = 10      | n = 10 |
| Controls  | M   | 214 (120–278) | 55 (39–88)  | 12 (9–14) |
|           |     | n = 19        | n = 20      | n = 20 |
| 3.6 mg kg⁻¹ mepacrine·hydrochloride | M   | 133 (88–198)  | 47 (32–94)  | 9 (8–11) |
|           |     | n = 19        | n = 20      | n = 20 |

In all 12 cases (experiments 1 to 6) the tumours from drug-treated mice yielded smaller median amounts of prostanoids when homogenised in acid-ethanol, but the P values were <0.1 compared to controls in only 3 groups (prednisolone, 6-keto-PGF₁α, mepacrine PGE, TXB₂). The results are ng ml⁻¹ wet issue, shown as medians with semiquartile ranges in parentheses.

Table III Serum prostanoids

| PGE   | 6-keto-PGF₁α | TXB₂ |
|-------|-------------|------|
| Control | 9 (8–11) | 25 (23–27) | 168 (160–175) |
| Prednisolone 500 μg kg⁻¹ | 9 (8–9) | 4 (4–5) | 312 (293–390) |
| Mepacrine 3.6 mg kg⁻¹ | 11 (10–11) | 9 (6–22) | 219 (127–300) |

Prednisolone-treated normal female mice had less 6-keto-PGF₁α and more TXB₂ in the serum samples. The same trend occurred with mepacrine. *P = 0.04 *P = 0.01 (Mann–Whitney U-test). Values are ng ml⁻¹ shown as medians with semiquartile ranges in parentheses. In all groups n = 8, except for mepacrine and 6-keto-PGF₁α where n = 7.

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