SHORT COMMUNICATION

Serum placental-like alkaline phosphatase levels and nicotine intake in smokers

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Cigarette smoking is the major cause of lung cancer (Doll, 1984; Loeb et al., 1984). Although the early events in lung tumorigenesis have still to be identified, it has been shown that cigarette smoking is associated with an increase in levels of serum alkaline phosphatase (Maslow et al., 1983; Tonik et al., 1983) which was subsequently shown to be due to a placental-like form (PLAP-like AP) of the enzyme (McLaughlin et al., 1984; Tucker et al., 1985a,b). The major source of the enzyme in cigarette smokers is probably the lung (Williams et al., 1986).

In this study we have explored the quantitative relationship between the amount of cigarette smoke inhaled each day and elevations in serum PLAP-like AP levels in an attempt to relate possible early tumorigenic events with tobacco consumption. Estimated smoke intake was based not only on numbers of cigarettes reported to be smoked each day, but also on objective estimates of nicotine intake obtained by determining nicotine metabolite levels in blood and urine since nicotine is a specific component of the particulate phase of tobacco smoke and because the tar and nicotine yields of most cigarettes are very highly correlated (Russell, 1976).

As part of an ongoing prospective study, coded serum and urine samples were obtained between 1977 and 1980 from over 2,000 normal women aged 35 years or more, living in Guernsey (Bulbrook et al., 1986). One to two weeks after a 24-hour urine sample had been collected, blood samples were taken between 1300 and 1900 hours and a detailed health questionnaire was completed. A smoking history was also obtained from the first 1,200 volunteers. Aliquots of urine and sera were then stored at –20°C until analysis.

PLAP-like AP levels were measured in 753 of the serum samples using the method of Tucker et al. (1985a), in which a monoclonal antibody (H17E2) was absorbed onto microtitre plate wells, serum aliquots added and the activity of the bound enzyme estimated colorimetrically using dinitrophenol phosphate as substrate and measuring the final optical density at 405 nm using a TiterTek Multiscan instrument.

An estimate of the relative amount of nicotine inhaled each day was obtained either from the urinary excretion of nicotine and its metabolites, after allowing for the influence of diuresis, or by measuring the concentration of nicotine’s major serum metabolite, cotinine. The nicotine metabolite/cotinine (NM/C) ratios (as μg apparent cotinine per mg creatinine) of the 955 urine samples available for analysis from the first 2,000 volunteers were determined colorimetrically using the barbituric acid and alkaline picate methods described previously (Peach et al., 1985). The actual smoking status of these 955 subjects was biochemically proven by testing aliquots of urine for nicotine metabolites by the specific qualitative diethyliobarbituric acid extraction method (Peach et al., 1985) since the only source of nicotine intake is by smoking tobacco or taking snuff. Among the 2,000 volunteers, smoking histories had been elicited from 1,100 and estimates of PLAP-like AP were made on serum samples from 663. Cotinine concentrations (ng/ml) were estimated in 165 serum samples by a minor modification of the radioimmunoassay method of Knight et al. (1985) in which the bound 125I-label was precipitated using polyethylene glycol and sheep anti-rabbit immunoglobulin.

The results of these studies showed that there was a progressive increase in mean serum PLAP-like AP levels, urinary nicotine metabolite excretion (expressed as NM/C ratios), and serum cotinine levels with increasing self-reported cigarette consumption (Table I). Thus there were highly significant and positive correlations between any two of these four variables (Table II). Similar correlations were demonstrated for biochemically proven smokers. These were also significant correlations between serum PLAP-like AP levels and both urinary nicotine metabolite excretion and serum cotinine levels among women reported to be smoking either 1–10 or 11–20 cigarettes per day (Table I).

The results presented in Table I show that there was a marked tendency for the urinary NM/C ratios and serum cotinine concentrations to plateau out with increasing numbers of cigarettes reported to have been smoked. This accords with previous evidence concerning the reduced efficiency with which cigarettes are smoked when daily consumption is very high (Feyerabend et al., 1982; Peach et al., 1985).

There was a strikingly high correlation (r = 0.83) between the urinary NM/C ratios and serum cotinine levels of the 55 proven smokers in whom both estimations were made. Since the inherent errors of the urinary and serum methods are essentially independent, it was concluded that each method must provide a reliable estimate of the relative daily intake of nicotine by smokers.

Since the tar/nicotine ratios of most brands of cigarettes are very similar, both measures of nicotine intake should provide good evidence of the relative rates at which cigarette-derived carcinogens were being trapped in the lungs of different smokers, although there might be substantial individual differences in the extent to which carcinogens were activated by hepatic metabolism (Idle et al., 1981).

The marked individual differences in the amounts of nicotine inhaled by smokers in each of the three self-reporting categories (Table I) is in accordance with previous evidence for differences in the efficiency with which cigarettes are smoked (Feyerabend et al., 1982; Peach et al., 1985), as well as inadvertent or deliberate errors of recall regarding cigarette consumption (Sillet et al., 1978; Peach et al., 1986). Thus in the current study 14 (3%) of the 475 volunteers who denied smoking were unequivocally identified as smokers by the diethyliobarbituric acid method, and had NM/C ratios averaging 7.6 which was only slightly less than the mean for the self-admitted smokers (8.4). Since many of the adverse effects of smoking are markedly dose-dependent (Butler et al., 1972; Doll & Peto, 1978; Doll et al., 1980; Loeb et al., 1984; Hirayama, 1987), these findings emphasise the importance of using objective measurements of nicotine intake (Haddow et al., 1987) in epidemiological

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Table I  Correlations between serum PLAP-like AP levels and smoke intake

| PLAP-like AP* | 0    | 1–10 | 11–20 | >20  |
|---------------|------|------|-------|------|
| Mean*         | 0.20 | 0.40 | 0.63  | 0.77 |
| (Range ± 1 s.d.) | 0.14–0.27 | 0.17–0.81 | 0.31–1.35 | 0.40–1.64 |
| Median        | 0.19 | 0.35 | 0.64  | 1.0  |
| (Range; N)    | 0.08–2.00; 485 | 0.10–2.00; 66 | 0.12–2.00; 70 | 0.17–2.00; 42 |

Urinary NM/C* Ismote

| Mean*         | 0.86 | 3.76 | 11.3  | 12.0 |
| (Range ± 1 s.d.) | 0.48–1.31 | 1.27–8.43 | 5.5–20.0 | 6.7–19.4 |
| Median        | 0.10 | 27.2 | 12.7  | 11.9 |
| (Range; N)    | 0.1–27.5; 475 | 0.8–13.9; 47 | 0.8–27.4; 46 | 0.8–25.8; 24 |

Serum cotinine

| Mean*         | <5* | 25   | 108   | 127  |
| (Range ± 1 s.d.) | 6–100 | 45–233 | 117   | 163  |
| Median        | <5  | 29   | 117   | 163  |
| (Range; N)    | All <5; 43 | 11–276; 32 | 7–435; 51 | 13–362; 34 |

Correlations

| PLAP-like AP is urinary NM/C | Medication | Serum cotinine |
|-----------------------------|------------|----------------|
| R²                          | 0.47       | 0.48           | 0.40 |
| N                           | 40         | 44             | 20  |
| P                           | <0.01      | <0.001         | NS (*<0.10) |

| PLAP-like AP is serum cotinine | Medication | Serum cotinine |
|-------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| R                             | 0.43       | 0.45           | 0.28 |
| N                             | 32         | 51             | 34  |
| P                             | <0.05      | <0.001         | NS (>0.10) |

*Optical density units; for conversion to International Units, see Tucker et al. (1985b); *Geometric mean; *Number of observations; *Urinary nicotine metabolites/creatinine (µg mg⁻¹); *Serum cotinine (ng ml⁻¹); *Linear correlation coefficient; *2.00 is the upper limit of the assay. There were 1, 3, 4 and 3 sera with such values within the smoking categories 0, 1–10, 11–20 and >20 cigarettes/day, respectively; *Lower limit of sensitivity.

Table II  Correlations between serum PLAP-like AP levels and nicotine intake in self-reported smokers

| Cigarette consumption* | Serum PLAP (optical density units) | Serum cotinine (ng ml⁻¹) | Urinary nicotine metabolite ratio |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                        | 0.32 (178)*                       | 0.56 (117)               | 0.51 (117)                     |
| Serum PLAP-like AP (optical density units) | --- | 0.49 (117) | 0.50 (104) |
| Serum cotinine (ng ml⁻¹) | --- | --- | 0.82 (54) |

*Expressed as correlation coefficient (number); *In calculating the correlation coefficients cigarette consumption of 1–10, 11–20 and >20 cigarettes/day have been taken as an average of 5, 15 and 25 cigarettes/day, respectively. All correlations were significant at P<0.001.

The potential value of using PLAP-like AP estimations as a ‘marker’ for tar intake should therefore be explored, especially in investigations as to whether nicotine-enhanced cigarettes might be less hazardous than standard brands (Russell, 1976; Holland et al., 1986).

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