The effect of lithium on radioiodine thyroid tissue ablation

S. Yavari\textsuperscript{1,2}, P. Geramifar\textsuperscript{3}, M. Fallahpoor\textsuperscript{1}, V. Changizi\textsuperscript{2}, M. Gholami\textsuperscript{4}, A. Meysamie\textsuperscript{5}, S. Farzanehfar\textsuperscript{1}, M. Abbasi\textsuperscript{1*}

\textsuperscript{1}Department of Nuclear Medicine, Vali-Asr Hospital, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
\textsuperscript{2}Department of Technology of Radiology and Radiotherapy, Allied Medical Sciences School, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
\textsuperscript{3}Research Center for Nuclear Medicine, Shariati Hospital, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
\textsuperscript{4}Department of Pharmacology and Toxicology, Faculty of Pharmacy, Pharmaceutical Sciences Research Center, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran
\textsuperscript{5}Department of Community and Preventive Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran

ABSTRACT

Background: Pretreatment with lithium in thyroid cancer patients before radioiodine therapy (RIT) has been suggested to improve the results of therapy in terms of higher radiation to thyroid tissue and limiting extra-thyroid irradiation. Materials and Methods: The beta and gamma radiation to the thyroid gland and lungs in 8 female New Zealand rabbits weighing 2.7 to 3.6 kg were simulated employing GATE Monte Carlo code. The study design was before-after and crossover; rabbits were orally treated with 165 to 288 $\mu$Ci $^{131}$I with or without pretreatment with 60 mg per day lithium. SPECT/CT imaging was done 20 to 24 hours after RIT providing the distribution and attenuation maps for simulation. The S-values were calculated and compared between the rabbits prepared with and without lithium before RIT by analysis of covariance. Results: For beta radiation, the thyroid to lung S-value ratios (TLR) was $10.5 \pm 1.6$ with lithium pretreatment and $15.9 \pm 12.5$ without it. For gamma rays, TLR was $4.8 \pm 1.8$ vs. $6.7 \pm 3.1$ in rabbits with and without lithium pretreatment. The values of TLR were higher without lithium pretreatment but statistically insignificant. Conclusion: Lithium demonstrated no improvement in radioiodine uptake in thyroid tissue. Pretreatment of differentiated thyroid cancer patients with lithium before RIT, which is backed by old literature, should be reconsidered.

Keywords: Monte Carlo simulation, lithium, $^{131}$I, specific dosimetry.

INTRODUCTION

RIT reduces the risk of future tumor recurrence and validates the thyroglobulin measurements for follow-up with a few side effects including xerostomia, xerophthalmia, and infertility \cite{1-3}. To minimize side effects, thyroid iodine uptake should be optimized. Administration of lithium has been suggested for this purpose. Lithium restrains thyroid hormone release \cite{4} and increases iodine trapping within the thyroid follicular and differentiated thyroid cancer cells \cite{5}. Consequently, the effect of RIT could be enhanced and the possibility of side effects would be reduced. Could the RIT be improved by lithium, the radioiodine dose for RIT may be lowered. In contrast to remarkable research \cite{6-9} and recommendations provided by American Thyroid Association \cite{10}, very few centers employ this medication. To verify the effect of Lithium on RIT, we performed dosimetry of radioiodine in rabbit with and without lithium administration. This is the first dosimetry study to assess the effect of lithium on RIT.
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was conducted on 8 New Zealand female rabbits aged about 1 year and weighed between 2.7 to 3.6 kg. The rabbits were provided by Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute and were kept for the study period in the animal lab of faculty of pharmacy (Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, Iran). Rabbits were allocated into group A (n= 3) and group B (n=5). The treatment flowchart is presented in figure 1.

The rabbits were imaged by a dual-head SPECT/CT (Symbia T1, Siemens, Germany) 20 to 24 hours after radioiodine administration. The following specifications were used: 30-second projections were collected at 4° in the step-and-shoot mode and the matrix sizes were 256*256. The distribution map and the attenuation map were extracted from the DICOM images of SPECT and CT, respectively. Interested organs were segmented using ITK-SNAP (version 3.2.0). For internal dosimetry, simulation with GATE Monte Carlo (6.0.0) was employed generating dose maps. Using MIRD formalism S-values were allocated to each organ in MATLAB (2009).

The S-values were calculated for beta particle (mean energy of 202 KeV) and gamma rays, and the TLR was compared between rabbits pretreated with or without lithium. Study protocol was approved by Tehran University of Medical Sciences’ ethics committee (IR.TUMS.SPH.REC.1395.761- 10 Oct 2016). For analyses, IBM SPSS (version 25) was employed; paired t-test and general linear models (both repeated measurement and univariate) were employed.

RESULTS

TLR for the S-value of beta and gamma radiations are presented in table 1. The TLR with and without lithium are 10.5 ± 1.6 vs. 15.9 ± 12.5 for beta; and 4.8 ± 1.8 vs 6.7 ± 3.1 for gamma rays (figure 2). The difference is not statistically significant (p=0.3 for beta and 0.1 for gamma). The dosimetry parameters of groups are tabulated in table 2. There is no interaction effect for the order of lithium administration and RIT; TLR was insignificantly higher in the rabbits without lithium pretreatment compared to those received lithium pretreatment (figure 2).
Lithium may increase the iodine trapping within the thyroid gland (12). The more the iodine in the thyroid tissue is accumulated, the better the outcome would be in terms of higher radiation to the target organ (i.e. thyroid gland) and low radiation elsewhere. Conversely, it has been documented that lithium reduces thyroid hormone production by reducing follicular cell colloid pinocytosis (13) which consequently affects iodine internalization and organification (14). This concept is against the main theory to pretreat patients with lithium before RIT. The results of the current study indicated that thyroid iodine absorbed dose was higher when the radioiodine was administered without pretreatment with lithium, albeit insignificantly.

Our study is limited because we performed the dosimetry once between 20 to 24 hours after RIT; however, the iodine is absorbed mostly in the first 24 hours after administration. Furthermore, the power of the study was not reasonably acceptable secondary to low sample size. We conducted our study in animal models because the pretreatment with lithium in thyroid cancer patients had ethical concerns for confronting patients with side effects without remarkable privilege. The thyroid function in rabbit and human are essentially similar.

The internal dosimetry for rabbits was done similar to our previous studies in human and...
phantom (15–18). GATE code is a dedicated code for simulation of the events after administration of nuclear medicine diagnostic and therapeutic radiopharmaceuticals (19). The beta and gamma irradiation to the thyroid and the lung, an organ where radiation is unwanted and should be limited, were simulated.

To sum up the current before-after crossover study does not support pretreatment of the thyroid cancer patients with lithium before RIT.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

All applicable institutional and/or national guidelines for the care and use of animals were followed.

Funding

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Authorship

Shima Yavari: prepared the animals for the study, performed the simulation, imaged the animals, administrated drugs (lithium, radioiodine, anesthetic).

Parham Geramifar: supervised the protocol of acquisitions (imaging), and simulation.

Maryam Fallahpoor: co-conceived verification and validation of the simulation.

Alipasha Meysamie: performed the data analysis Vahid Changizi: co-conceived the performing of the study and participated in data interpretation

Mahdi Gholami: care-giving the animals during the research.

Saeed Farzanehfar: co-conceived the clinical phases.

Mehrosh Abbasi: supervised the clinical phases analysis, adjusting dosage, evaluating the protocol accuracy, imaging analysis and interpretation, and drafted the paper.

Conflicts of interest: Declared none.

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