Prognostic Value of Serial C-Reactive Protein Measurements in Left-Sided Native Valve Endocarditis

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Background: The clinical course of left-sided native valve infective endocarditis varies from uncomplicated disease to fulminant infection. Although several factors are known to affect clinical outcome, it is difficult to predict morbidity and mortality in individual patients. The objective of this study was to determine the value of serial C-reactive protein (CRP) measurements as a predictor of clinical outcome.

Methods: One hundred twenty-three consecutive patients who fulfilled the Duke criteria for definite left-sided native valve infective endocarditis were prospectively enrolled. Poor outcome was defined as serious infectious complications or death. Patients were followed up for 12 weeks after the end of antimicrobial therapy. Multivariate analysis was used to examine the relative importance of the CRP level as a predictor of poor outcome after adjusting for age, abscess, multivalvular involvement, and Staphylococcus aureus infection.

Results: After 1 week of therapy, the adjusted odds ratio for poor outcome was 10.3 (95% confidence interval, 2.2-49.4) for patients with CRP levels in the highest tertile (>122 mg/L [to convert to nanomoles per liter, multiply by 9.524]) vs the lowest tertile (1-69 mg/L). A low percentage decline during the first week of treatment was statistically significantly associated with a higher risk of poor outcome (logistic regression coefficient, 1.1; P=.009). At no point in time did CRP level predict the need for cardiac surgery.

Conclusion: High CRP level after 1 week of treatment and a slow percentage decline in CRP level during the first week of treatment are indicators of poor clinical outcome.

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complicated courses compared with episodes with uncomplicated courses. However, a clear definition of a complicated course is not given by the authors, which makes it difficult to apply the results clinically. The second study, by Heiro et al., was a retrospective study during a 20-year period, and CRP measurements were obtained without a clear protocol. It is likely that CRP measurements were obtained more often in episodes with a complicated clinical course, which renders the finding of elevated CRP levels in this patient group more likely. The objective of the present prospective study was to determine the value of serial CRP measurements as a predictor of clinical outcome in patients with left-sided native valve IE.

METHODS

PATIENTS

The study was designed as a prospective cohort study in 23 hospitals in the Netherlands, 8 of which are cardiothoracic surgery centers. The selection of hospitals was based on an earlier nationwide epidemiological study in which 70% of the patients with IE were admitted to those centers. The study was approved by the medical ethics committees of all participating hospitals.

Between November 1, 2000, and October 31, 2003, all adult patients (≥18 years) who were suspected of having left-sided native valve IE were referred to the study center. Endocarditis was defined according to the Duke Endocarditis Service criteria, and only definite cases of endocarditis were included in the analysis. Patients who had already started antimicrobial treatment in the absence of CRP measurements were excluded from the analysis. Patients who had already started antimicrobial treatment were defined according to the American Heart Association guidelines.

CLINICAL DATA

Eligible patients were informed about the study and were asked for written consent. All consenting patients were visited during their stay at the hospital. Clinical data were extracted from the medical records or by direct questioning or examination of the patient. Data included injection drug use, demographic characteristics, signs of metastatic infection, physical examination results, vascular and immunologic phenomena, previously documented cardiac conditions, and the presence of new or known cardiac murmurs. Also collected were surgical, septic, multivalvular involvement, and radiologic and laboratory study data.

OUTCOME

The end point of the study was poor outcome, which was defined as serious infectious complications or death from the time of diagnosis through 3 months after the end of antimicrobial therapy. Arthritis, meningitis, osteomyelitis, visceral abscess, peripheral emboli, mycotic aneurysm, septic pulmonary infarction, and intracranial hemorrhage or infarction were considered serious infectious complications.

CRP MEASUREMENTS

C-reactive protein measurements were obtained locally in the laboratories of the participating hospitals. The CRP level was obtained at the start of antimicrobial treatment (baseline) and was measured each Monday, Wednesday, and Friday thereafter until the end of therapy. The reference value of CRP level was less than 5 mg/L (to convert to nanomoles per liter, multiply by 9.524). For patients who were admitted with a serious adverse event, only the CRP level at baseline was included in the analysis. When patients reached the end point of poor outcome or underwent cardiac surgery, whichever came first, their time to an event was considered to be censored, and CRP levels determined after this were excluded from the analysis.

FOLLOW-UP

All patients were followed up until 12 weeks after the last date of antimicrobial treatment. Follow-up data were collected by contacting the patient or his or her general practitioner by telephone 3 months after hospital discharge. If a patient had been readmitted during this period, additional data were collected from the corresponding hospital.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

To express the ability of CRP level to predict poor outcome, we constructed receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curves at baseline and at different times during antimicrobial treatment. In a ROC curve, sensitivity (y-axis) is plotted vs 1 minus specificity (x-axis) for each possible cutoff value of CRP level. The area under the curve represents the discriminative power of the test. Values are between 0.0 and 1.0 (higher values indicate better accuracy), with 1.0 for a perfectly accurate test result and 0.5 for a test result that is not better than flipping a coin.

To determine the predictive value of CRP levels at different times during antimicrobial treatment, we divided the range of baseline CRP levels into tertiles and included them in a logistic regression model with poor outcome as the dependent variable. In the model, we included age, abscess, multivalvular involvement, Staphylococcus aureus as causative microorganism, and CRP tertile. We also determined the prognostic value of the percentage decline from baseline in CRP levels after 1 and 2 weeks of treatment. The percentage decline in CRP level was calculated by dividing the CRP levels after 1 and 2 weeks by the CRP level at baseline. The result was log transformed and incorporated into the logistic regression model as a continuous variable with poor outcome as the dependent variable and was adjusted for age, abscess, multivalvular involvement, and S. aureus as causative microorganism. Data analysis was performed using commercially available software (SPSS version 12.0; SPSS Inc., Chicago, Illinois).

RESULTS

Of 251 patients who were referred to the study center, 42 had prosthetic intracardial material, 4 had right-sided endocarditis, and 2 were younger than 18 years. Endocarditis was rejected in 28 patients. Of 175 remaining eligible patients, 52 (29.7%) were excluded: 27 patients in whom antimicrobial treatment had been started before study enrollment in the absence of CRP measurements, 3 patients who died before inclusion, and 22 patients who declined to provide informed consent. Table 1 gives demographic and clinical characteristics, infecting microorganisms, and site of infection in the remaining 123 patients. All patients fulfilled the Duke Endocarditis Service criteria for definite endocarditis. In 36 patients (29.3%), material obtained by cardiac surgery
accident was present at the time of diagnosis of endocarditis in 6 of these patients. The median time from diagnosis of endocarditis until cerebral vascular accident was 13 days (range, 1-32 days) in the remaining 13 patients. In the patients with serious complications other than cerebral vascular accident, the complication was present before or at the time of diagnosis of IE in 7 patients. In the remaining 12 patients, the complication manifested after a median of 8 days (range, 2-24 days) from diagnosis of endocarditis. In total, there were 46 patients (37.4%) with poor outcome. This number is less than the sum of the patients who died and those with serious infectious complications because several patients with an infectious complication died.

At baseline, CRP levels were elevated (range, 20-687 mg/L) in all 123 patients. The mean CRP level at baseline was 89 mg/L (range, 20-324 mg/L) in patients infected with viridans streptococci, 89 mg/L (range, 22-186 mg/L) in patients infected with Streptococcus bovis, 67 mg/L (range, 26-191 mg/L) in patients infected with enterococci, and 179 mg/L (range, 39-483 mg/L) in patients infected with S. aureus.

The median CRP level declined during antimicrobial treatment, although there was large interindividual variability. The median CRP level was 83 mg/L (range, 20-687 mg/L) at baseline, 38.5 mg/L (range, 1-296 mg/L) after 1 week, 27 mg/L (range, 1-231 mg/L) after 2 weeks, 21 mg/L (range, 1-253 mg/L) after 3 weeks, 16 mg/L (range, 1-228 mg/L) after 4 weeks, 13 mg/L (range, 1-223 mg/L) after 5 weeks, and 9 mg/L (range, 1-171 mg/L) after 6 weeks. The area under the ROC curve for CRP level to predict poor outcome in patients with left-sided native valve IE was 0.63 (95% confidence interval [CI], 0.52-0.74) at baseline, 0.70 (95% CI, 0.60-0.81) at 1 week, and 0.66 (95% CI, 0.54-0.78) at 2 weeks after the start of antimicrobial therapy (Figure).

Patients were divided into tertiles based on CRP level at baseline. Adjusted odds ratios (ORs) for poor outcome are given in Table 3. At baseline, the adjusted OR for poor outcome (serious infectious complications or death) was 2.3 (95% CI, 0.9-6.3) among patients with CRP levels in the highest tertile (>122 mg/L) compared with patients with CRP levels in the lowest tertile (20-69 mg/L).
mg/L). After 1 week of treatment, the adjusted OR for poor outcome was 10.3 (95% CI, 2.2-49.4) among patients with CRP levels in the highest tertile (>122 mg/L) compared with patients with CRP levels in the lowest tertile (1-69 mg/L).

The percentage decline in CRP levels after 1 and 2 weeks was transformed into a log scale, was analyzed in a logistic regression model as a continuous variable with poor outcome as the dependent variable, and was adjusted for age, abscess, multivalvular involvement, and S. aureus as causative microorganism. The logistic regression coefficient after 1 week was 1.1 (P = .009) and after 2 weeks was 0.7 (P = .09), indicating a statistically significant increased risk of poor outcome with a decreasing percentage decline. For example, a patient with a percentage decline of 75% after 1 week had a probability of 19% of having a poor outcome, whereas the probability was 52% of having a poor outcome when there was no decline in CRP level after 1 week.

Fifty-eight patients (47.2%) underwent cardiac surgery, 35 before the end of the standard treatment course and 23 patients thereafter. The area under the ROC curve for CRP level to predict the need for cardiac surgery in patients with left-sided native valve IE was 0.46 (95% CI, 0.36-0.56) at baseline, 0.46 (95% CI, 0.34-0.57) after 1 week of antimicrobial treatment, and 0.52 (95% CI, 0.39-0.65) after 2 weeks of treatment.

The present study showed the value of serial CRP measurements in predicting poor outcome (serious infectious complications or death) in 123 patients with left-sided native valve IE. The CRP level after 1 week of treatment and the percentage decline in CRP level during the first week of treatment were strong predictors of poor outcome. Demographic and clinical characteristics and the infecting microorganisms in the patients of this study were comparable to those in patients with left-sided native valve IE in other studies.13-15

Most studies16-21 that addressed the role of CRP level in patients with IE studied its value in affirming or rejecting the diagnosis of endocarditis. In these studies, CRP level was shown to be elevated in 98% to 100% of patients with IE. In 1997, Lamas and Eykyn22 suggested the addition of a high CRP level (>100 mg/L) to the Duke Endocarditis Service criteria for diagnosis of IE. Few studies investigated the value of CRP level at hospital admission6 or through serial CRP measurements during antimicrobial treatment9,10,23-25 as a predictor of poor outcome in IE. In a study by Durante Mangoni et al,3 CRP level at the time of hospital admission was an independent variable associated with an increased incidence of embolic events. In our study, we found comparable results; the
OR for poor outcome at baseline was more than 2-fold higher in the patients with CRP levels in the highest ter-
tile (>122 mg/L) compared with patients with CRP lev-
els in the lowest tertile (20-69 mg/L).

Studies addressing the value of serial CRP measure-
ments as a predictor of clinical outcome in IE have yielded
conflicting results. In a prospective study, CRP level was
measured serially in 21 patients with IE who were ini-
tially treated using antimicrobial treatment alone. In con-
trast to the present study, the investigators included pa-
tients with native and prosthetic valve IE. In 13 patients,
CRP levels returned to normal at 6 to 30 days (mean, 13
days) after treatment initiation. One of these 13 patients
who experienced early prosthetic valve endocarditis died
of mechanical problems with the valve soon after the start
of treatment. Antimicrobial treatment was successful in
the 12 remaining patients. In 8 patients in whom CRP
levels did not return to normal, 5 required valve replace-
ment, 2 experienced relapse of infection, and 1 died dur-
ing treatment. The study did not investigate the prog-
nostic value of CRP measurements at different times
during antimicrobial treatment. The authors concluded
that a progressive return of CRP level to normal possi-
ably correlated with satisfactory recovery, despite the fact
that the numbers were too small to produce statistically
significant results. In another prospective study, the au-
thors stated that a statistically significant decline in se-
rum CRP levels was found after 2, 3, and 4 weeks of an-
timicrobial treatment in uncomplicated episodes compared with complicated episodes. These results were
only presented graphically, and exact numbers or P values
were not given. We did not include cardiac surgery in
the definition of poor outcome because in most pa-
tients with IE the indication for surgery is not persistent
infection but heart failure due to valve regurgitation. CRP
levels in the lowest tertile (20-69 mg/L).

The results of the present study indicate that serial CRP
measurements during the first week of antimicrobial treat-
ment can be used as a prognostic factor for poor out-
come. CRP measurements should probably be limited to days 1 and 7 of the first week of treatment. However, it was impossible to determine a cutoff value with high sensitivity and specificity to identify high-risk patients. Consequently, CRP level cannot be used as a sole prognostic factor, but it should be applied in combination with other clinical variables that have yet to be identified.

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