Letters to the Editors

Comment on:
Clinical efficacy of oral alendronate in ankylosing spondylitis: a randomised placebo-controlled trial

Sirs,
We have read with much interest the paper by Coates et al. “Clinical efficacy of oral alendronate in ankylosing spondylitis: a randomised placebo-controlled trial” (1). In this study, 180 patients with ankylosing spondylitis (AS) were randomised to receive either weekly alendronate 70 mg or placebo. The authors found no significant difference between the placebo and treatment groups in any of the recorded outcomes over the two years including clinical indices (BAS-G was the primary outcome), biomarkers, and radiographic progression. The study is well designed and we agree with the authors that oral alendronate is probably not effective in the treatment of AS. However, we disagree with their conclusion against the efficacy of all bisphosphonates in AS and we suggest an explanation for the lack of effect of oral versus intravenous amino-bisphosphonates. In our experience, we showed that intravenous neridronate could be as effective as infliximab in the treatment of AS (2).

In our opinion there is an additional explanation concerning the discrepancy between oral and intravenous amino-bisphosphonates (neridronate, pamidronate or zoledronate) in their effects on AS patients. Amino-bisphosphonates inhibit osteoclastic bone resorption by blocking farnesyl pyrophosphate synthase, an enzyme in the mevalonate pathway, so accumulating isopentenyl diphosphate and dimethylallyl diphosphate in monocytes and resulting in the activation of adjacent γδ T cells with the release of interferon-γ and TNF and the appearance of an acute phase response (APR) (3). We have previously demonstrated that the risk of APR is correlated with circulating γδ T cells (4), and that the circulating γδ T cell counts decrease after the infusion of zoledronic acid, in particular in the patients who experienced an APR (5, 6). Recently, it has been suggested an important role of γδ T cells in the pathogenesis and clinical manifestations of AS. Kenna et al. (10) reported a three-fold higher frequency of circulating γδ T cells and five-fold higher percentage of IL-23R-expressing γδ T cells in AS patients compared with healthy controls and RA patients. Strikingly in this study, γδ T cells were suggested to be the dominant IL-17 producers in AS. More recently it has been reported that activated γδ T-cells are abundant in enthesis, ciliary body and aortic valve in Tcrd-H2BeGFP mice (11). We suggest that the immunomodulating effects of amino-bisphosphonates on γδ T cells, that are more frequent with intravenous versus oral administration, may explain their clinical effects in AS.

A. GIOLO
D. GATTI
O. VIAPIANA
L. IDOLAZZI
A. FASSIO
G. ADAMI
M.Rossini
Department of Medicine, Rheumatology Unit, University of Verona, Italy.

Address correspondence to: Alessandro Gioilo, MD, Dept. of Medicine, Rheumatology Unit, University of Verona, Piazzale L.A. Scuro 10, 37026 Verona, Italy.
E-mail: alessandrogiolo@gmail.com

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References