Myelodysplastic syndrome with erythroid hypoplasia

R Goyal, N Varma, R K Marwaha

The incidence of myelodysplastic syndrome (MDS) with erythroid hypoplasia/aplasia is probably underestimated because in most patients it is mistaken for acquired pure red cell aplasia. This report describes three children who fulfilled the criteria for MDS with erythroid hypoplasia/aplasia. All these patients had transfusion dependent anaemia, reticulocytopenia, erythroid hypoplasia/aplasia, severe dysgranulopoiesis, and dysmegakaryopoiesis.

DISCUSSION

In the review by Garcia-Suarez et al, all 16 cases had bone marrow dysplasia in at least two of the haemopoietic cell lineages to allow the morphological diagnosis of MDS. FAB subtypes were RA in nine patients, chronic myelomonocytic leukaemia in four, RA with an excess of blasts in two, and RA with ring sideroblasts in one patient. The incidence of MDS with erythroid hypoplasia/aplasia is probably underestimated because in most patients it is misdiagnosed as acquired pure red cell aplasia. In general, the bone marrow pathology is strikingly limited to the erythroid cell lines and acquired pure red cell aplasia. The presence of bone marrow hypercellularity with a left shift of the granulocytic series, in addition to the presence of hypogranular myelocytes, mononuclear megakaryocytes, collections of monocytoid blasts, and ring sideroblasts in the iron stain should direct the diagnosis away from that of acquired pure red cell aplasia.

A paucity of erythroid precursors in MDS is also seen in 5q-syndrome, which is usually characterised by refractory macrocytic anaemia, a normal to increased platelet count, and increased numbers of megakaryocytes, many of which have hypolobated nuclei. It usually occurs in elderly women although it has also rarely been described in children. In a series of 43 cases of 5q-syndrome by Mathew et al, the median age was 68 years and the age range was 29–86 years. The cytogenetic result was available in only one of our cases, but the very young age of our patients and the presence of severe dysgranulopoiesis and dysmegakaryopoiesis (in addition to nuclear hypolobation) make 5q-syndrome unlikely, although it cannot be ruled out because of a lack of cytogenetic results in two of our cases.

The mechanism of erythroid hypoplasia in MDS is unknown. It presumably has an autoimmune aetiology or is the result of an intrinsic defect of maturation and proliferation of erythroid precursors as a part of the MDS. No effective treatment has yet been reported, and most patients require repeated transfusions, with a subsequent increased risk for developing haemosiderosis. In contrast to primary acquired red cell aplasia, steroids are not helpful because of the intrinsic stem cell defect. Treatment with cytokotoxic or differentiation inducing agents in the series of 16 patients was not effective. Immunosuppressive agents such as

Abbreviations: MDS, myelodysplastic syndrome; RA, refractory anaemia
anithymocyte globulin can be tried. In a study by Molldrem et al, one third of the patients with MDS achieved sustained independence from red blood cell transfusion.\(^1\) The mechanism underlying the response to anithymocyte globulin is not clear. The suppressive activity of autologous T cells that can suppress granulocyte and erythroid marrow cell progenitors is lost after anithymocyte globulin treatment.\(^2\)

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