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Bronchial asthma

Sir,

Mzayek has brought out the complex mechanisms involved in the pathogenesis and treatment of bronchial asthma in a nutshell. In view of the current developments, it is worthwhile considering the genetic susceptibility to asthma and its severity as well as in the pathogenesis. Hence tomorrow's target of bronchial asthma would likely be gene therapy and protection of environment. Apart from that, doctors of today and tomorrow should understand the social and emotional impact of asthma during treatment and act accordingly. In addition training of nurses involved in asthma cases should be considered for effective management and for better compliance.

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References

Sir,

Report of a meeting.

IXth International AIDS Conference, Vancouver, Canada (7-12th July 1996).

'Slight light in the AIDS tunnel!'

Please, no incautious optimism!

As a follow-up to the previous AIDS Conference the author reports on the Vancouver Conference's events and breakthroughs. Approximately 15,000 delegates attended this meeting from different walks of life, among them were AIDS activist groups. Brief exceptions from the Conference are given below.

Robert Gallow from the Institute of Human Virology, Baltimore, Maryland, USA reported on new evidence of a correlation between the levels of chemokines and the natural ability to resist the HIV infection. His final prediction was that special types of chemokines could pave the way to HIV control. Director of United National Program on Aids (UNAIDS) gave recent up-date figures of HIV/AIDS. He stated that there are now 22 million HIV+ve persons (worldwide), 90% of whom are from developing counties. The incidence rates have diminished in the USA (40,000 cases only this year) and also in Thailand and Uganda due to the success of health and sex-educational programs. However, the incidence in India has reached 5 million new cases (HIV+ve status). Researchers from New York's Aaron Diamond AIDS Center, USA reported on the three-drug regimen (nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (AZT + non-nucleotides reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTI) (Lamivudine/3TC) and the new protease inhibitors (Ritonavir/Indinavir/ABT/538).

Patients who had been on this regimen for 10 months were followed up and results showed no signs of HIV replication. It was felt that this combination therapy program keep HIV from replicating until the HIV infected cells had died, then it would have reversed the disease process. The team also mentioned a two-drug combination program ([AZT + protease inhibitor (Ritonavir)]. However they felt that the 3-drug regimen was the better choice of program. Roy Gulick, New York University, USA reported on 7 cases of advanced AIDS patients who were given the 3-drug cocktail.
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(AZT+3TC+Indinavir) for 48 weeks and out of the 7 cases 6 were HIV-free. This result therefore is a promising prognosis for the 3-drug combination regimen. Peter Piot of UNAIDS reported on the combination therapies and mentioned that although this new regimen could successfully suppress the HIV load and even dive the virus load down below the level detected by the current methods of diagnosis, there was still no evidence that the combined therapy eradicated the HIV, as the virus could remain in the lymph nodes and/or central nervous system. William Paul, Director of The Office of AIDS Research (OAR), NIH, USA, called for renewed efforts to find a protective vaccine to prevent the HIV infection. He promised to increase the resources for research on vaccine development and to launch a “restructured, redirected vaccine research program in his Institute.” The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVA) USA backed by funds from the Rockefeller Foundation will help to prepare vaccines for the poor countries. Seth Berkely of the Rockefeller Foundation criticized the NIH for spending 8% of its AIDS budget ($100 million) on vaccine work, and requested the National Institute of Health (NIH) to change its policy regarding the vaccine program. Martin Schechter, University of British Columbia, Canada stated that “we are at a crossroads in the history of AIDS pandemic and we are beginning to see glimmers of hope,” but we must stress that they are only “glimmers”.

At this Conference there were no noisy protests from AIDS activist groups as had previously happened at the 10 previous Conferences. On the contrary, the activist groups welcomed the new rising interest in therapy and vaccine development. However, we have to realise that we have to go a long way before we can say we have reached our goal. Even if the new 3-drug cocktail regimen is successful, we must take into account that the cost of this program would be $15,000 annually for each case and such an amount is out of the range of even a wealthy country. Concern was expressed regarding the possibility of new strains of HIV that could turn resistant to the 3-drug combination therapy. The author’s opinion is similar to that of Dr. Scott Hammer of Boston University, USA who stated “we have to avoid the idea that we have arrived.” There are still more miles to be navigated before we reach port in the ocean of AIDS.

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References