# Immune Reactions in Liver Disease

Edited by

ALWF Eddleston JCP Weber Roger Williams

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A L W F Eddleston J C P Weber Roger Williams





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#### **PARTICIPANTS**

Alberti, A. University of Padova, Italy Allison, AC, Northwick Park Hospital, Harrow, UK Batchelor, JR, Blond Laboratories, Queen Victoria Hospital, East Grinstead, UK Berg, P. Medizinische Universitätsklinik, Tubingen, Germany Bernardi, M. University of Bologna, Italy Berthowe, F, Hopital Herriot, Lyon, France Bianchi, FB, University of Bologna, Italy Calne, RY, University of Cambridge Clinical School, Cambridge, UK Cannady, WG, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Cantell, K, Central Public Health Laboratory, Helsinki, Finland Chen, T, College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Newark, USA Chiarmonte, M. University of Padova, Padova, Italy Chisari, FV, Scripps Clinic, La Jolla, USA Cochrane, AMG, King's College Hospital, London, UK Colombo, M. Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, USA Davis, M, King's College Hospital, London, UK de Groote, J. University of Leuven, Belgium Desmyter, J. Rega Institute for Medical Research, Leuven, Belgium Doniach, D. Middlesex Hospital, London, UK Dubey, DP, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Eddleston, ALWF, King's sollege Hospital, London, UK Edginton, TS, Scripps Clinic, La Jolla, USA El Sheikh, N, King's College Hospital, London, UK Falchuk, KL, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Fernandez, L, King's College Hospital, London, UK Fitzpatrick, D, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Galambos, JT, Emory University School of Medicine, Atlanta, USA Galbraith, RM, King's College Hospital, London, UK Gillette, JR, National Institutes of Health, Bethesda, USA Good, RA, Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, New York, USA Guarriero-Bobylera, V, University of Bologna, Italy Henning, H, University of Tubingen, Tubingen, Germany Hodgson, HJF, Royal Postgraduate Medical School, London, UK Holborow, EJ, The London Hospital Medical College, London, UK Hütteroth, TH, Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany Jain, S, Royal Free Hospital, London, UK Jewell, D. Royal Free Hospital, London, UK Kanagasundaram, N, College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Newark, USA Leevy, CM, College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Newark, USA Liebe CS, Veterans Admiristration Hospital, New York, USA McFarlane, IG, King's College Hospital, London, UK Mackay, IR, The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, Melbourne, Australia MacSween, S. Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Matsumoto, K, College of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Newark, USA Meyer zum "üschenfelde, KH, Freie Universität, Berlin, Germany Miller, JO, Yaie University School of Medicine, New Haven, USA Moussouros, A, King's College Hospital, London, UK Nielsen, JO, Copenhagen Kommunes Hvidovre Hospital, Denmark Noreen, H, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Paronetto, F, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, USA

Pattison, J. King's College Hospital, London, UK Perlmann, P, Wenner-Gren Institute, Stockholm, Sweden Popper, H, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, USA Preisig, R, University of Berne, Berne, Switzerland Read, A, University of Bristol, Bristol, UK Alberti, A. University of Padova, Italy Realdi, G, University of Padova, Italy Redeker, AG, University of Southern California, Los Angeles, USA Barchelor, JR, Blond Labout Revillard, JP, Hôpital Herriot, Lyon, France Roitt, IM, The Middlesex Hospital Medical School, London, UK Scheuer, P. Royal Free Hospital, London, UK Schuff-Werner, P, University of Tubingen, Tubingen, Germany liteacht FB (friversity of Priogna, Ital Scullard, G, King's College Hospital, London, UK Sherlock, S, Royal Free Hospital, London, UK Sullivan, S, King's College Hospital, London, UK Talal, N. University of California School of Medicine, San Francisco, USA Thomas, H. Royal Free Hospital, London, UK Thomas London, W, The Institute for Cancer Research, Philadelphia, USA Trepo, C. Hopital Herriot, Lyon, France Trey, C, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Januard Rescale O a and A Discrete O Tsantoulas, DC, King's College Hospital, London, UK Vergani, D, King's Collège Hospital, London, UK hobroof, lategook essilled danks of sived Vernace, S, Mount Sinai School of Medicine, New York, USA Vogten, AJM, Academisch Ziekenhuis Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands Walton, B, The London Hospital, London, UK Wands, JR, The Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, USA Wansborough-Jones, M, King's College Hospital, London, UK Wilkinson, S, King's College Hospital, London, UK Williams, RM, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Williams, Roger, King's College Hospital, London, UK Fernander, I., - . ng's College Hospital. Wojcicka, B, King's College Hospital, London, UK Wright, R, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK Calambia, JT. I mory University Scho Yunis, EJ, Harvard Medical School, Boston, USA Zauli, D, University of Bologna, Italy Zuckerman, AJ, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, London, UK and PA, Archorist Storal-Kertern

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#### INTRODUCTION

Roger Williams

It is about eight years since our last meeting on immune reactions in liver disease. Some of you who were at that meeting will know only too well what an enormous amount has been added to our knowledge since then. We would not be able to cover it all in this book, and we have therefore tried to identify certain main areas of importance. Active chronic hepatitis is at the centre of the stage, but in alcoholic liver disease and hepatic drug reactions there is undoubtedly, at least in some patients, an autoimmune component. The scope too has been widened by the finding of a relationship to certain histocompatibility antigens and familial influences are also more clearly apparent. We hope that our discussions here will give some perspective to these new areas of knowledge.

There are three questions too, to which I hope we will address ourselves in this book, even if we may not be able to answer them exactly as yet.

- 1. Can we ever prove that autoimmunity is damaging to the liver in man?
- 2. Can we relate the defects in immunoregulation to a genetic background?
- 3. Can specific immunotherapy for the abnormalities found be developed?

## IMMUNE RESPONSES TO THE LIVER-SPECIFIC MEMBRANE LIPOPROTEIN

A L. W F Eddleston

In this presentation, I shall review some of the evidence that our group and others have obtained relating to the role of immunity to a liver-specific membrane lipoprotein in the pathogenesis of chronic active hepatitis. Our interest in this unusual antigen was entirely due to Professor Deborah Doniach who pointed out the importance of the work of Professor Meyer zum Buschenfelde and his colleagues at the end of the 1960s. He had discovered two liver-specific antigens in the supernatant of a human liver homogenate and had partially separated them by column chromotography [1]. Immunofluorescent studies indicated that one was found in the cytoplasm of hepatocytes while the other was an unstable high molecular weight lipoprotein derived from the hepatocyte surface membrane [2]. Antisera to these antigens were prepared in rabbits, and of considerable importance was the finding that these immunised animals developed inflammatory lesions in the liver [3], akin to those of chronic aggressive hepatitis in man (Figure 1). After prolonged immunisation, some of the animals progressed to cirrhosis [4], another characteristic of the human disease. At this time the membrane lipoprotein could not be prepared in a stable purified form but Meyer zum Buschenfelde and his colleagues were able to show that immunisation with the cytoplasmic antigen alone was relatively ineffective in inducing the liver damage [3], thus implicating the membrane lipoprotein in the pathogenesis of the experimental lesion.

We began to look for immune responses to the liver membrane lipoprotein (LSP) in patients with chronic active hepatitis in 1970 after first purifying the relevant antigen. This difficult task was undertaken first by Dr Joanna Miller [5] and later by Dr Ian McFarlane who has since gone on to explore the structure and properties of LSP [6].

The method of purification consists essentially of a series of gel chromogography columns through which the supernatant of a human liver homogenate is passed [6]. The membrane lipoprotein appears in the void volume on chromoto-

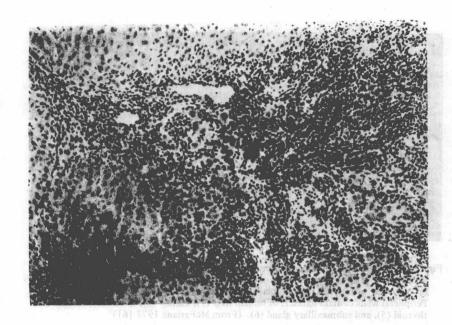


Figure 1 The histological features of chronic aggressive hepatitis induced in the liver of a rabbit by multiple injections of human liver-specific antigens.

(By courtesy of Professor Meyer zum Büschenfelde)

graphy over Sepharose 4B indicating an apparent molecular weight of greater than 20 million but, since hydrophobic molecules behave abnormally in gel chromotography, this estimate may not be accurate. Dr McFarlane has prepared the apoprotein by treatment with sodium deoxycholate and this is included in Sepharose 4B, producing a single peak [6]. Unfortunately the immunological reactivity is lost after this treatment [6].

The organ specificity of LSP has been confirmed by immunodiffusion (Figure 2). Polyvalent antiserum raised in guinea pigs against a crude preparation of LSP (the first peak from Sephadex G-100) and absorbed with normal human plasma gave two lines on immunodiffusion against liver homogenate (Figure 2a). One of these appeared to be liver-specific, the other showed complete identity with a line obtained against kidney, spleen, adrenal, thyroid and submaxillary gland homogenates. This second line was distinct from another line obtained against an adrenal homogenate. After further absorption of the polyvalent antiserum with purified freeze dried LSP the liver-specific line disappeared while the other reaction with the liver homogenate and those with all the other organ extracts were not affected (Figure 2b). The same antiserum showed surface immunofluorescence when incubated with isolated rabbit hepatocytes, a phenomenon which was not observed when the antiserum was first absorbed with LSP [6].

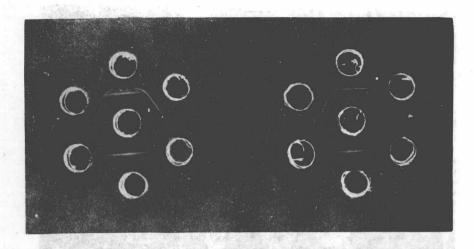


Figure 2 Immunodiffusion using guinea pig antiserum in centre wells raised against the Sephadex G-100 first peak of the supernatant of a human liver homogenate:

(a) absorbed with normal human plasma and (b) further absorbed with purified LSP. Peripheral wells contain extracts of human liver (1), kidney (2), spleen (3), adrenal (4), thyroid (5), and submaxillary gland (6). (From McFarlane 1977 [6])

#### Cellular Immunity to LSP

We first looked at cellular immune reactions to this antigen using the leucocyte migration test, and found that 11 of 16 patients with chronic active hepatitis showed evidence of sensitisation to LSP [5]. The number of patients who could be studied was limited at this stage because the lipoprotein antigen was only stable in solution for two or three days. Thus the discovery by Dr McFarlane that stability could be extended for up to two years by the addition of ImM EDTA to the Tris HCl buffersystem [6] represented a major practical advance. Further studies using the leucocyte migration test showed that sensitisation to LSP was an almost universal finding in cases of untreated chronic active hepatitis while in those cases treated with prednisone with or without azathioprine the incidence of migration inhibition was lower, particularly in those with satisfactory biochemical control of disease activity (Table I).

TABLE I Cellular Immune Response to LSP in Chronic Active Hepatitis and the Effect of Immunosuppressive Therapy

other tue obtained against an e polyvalent antiserum with		Inhibition of leucocyte migration with LSP as antigen
Untreated meano tanto add	14   11   11   12   13   14   15   15   15   15   15   15   15	13 (93%)
bilirubin	23	16 (70%)
Treated: with normal serum bilirubin	antisetus 21	ant name bev 9 (43%).

An important further step in the investigation of the possible pathogenic role of immune responses to LSP was to demonstrate that lymphocytes from patients with chronic active hepatitis were capable of killing isolated liver cells in tissue culture. I went to Bob Good's laboratory in Minneapolis for 15 months and returned, as a determined and enthusiastic immunologist, to set up such an assay, but failed — not, I hasten to add, through any defect in an excellent training programme. Dr Malcolm Cochrane then joined our Unit and, with no previous immunological training, quickly succeeded in developing a system which has proved invaluable in further analysing lymphocyte/hepatocyte interactions in vitro. We chose rabbit hepatocytes as the target cells as these were readily available, seemed easier to maintain in short term tissue culture and, most importantly, have a surface antigen which cross-reacts with human LSP [2]. The hepatocytes were isolated by enzyme digestion and after short term culture plated into

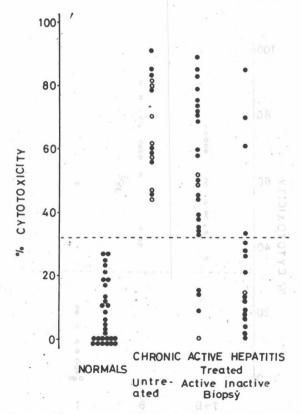


Figure 3 Percentages of hepatocytes killed after incubation for 48 hours with peripheral blood lymphocytes from normal subjects and from patients with chronic active hepatitis. The patients have been divided into three groups — those untreated at the time of the assay, those treated with prednisone with or without azathioprine whose liver biopsy still showed evidence of disease activity and those well-controlled by histological criteria. The dotted line shows the upper limit of the normal range. • HBsAg positive, • HBsAg negative

microwells [7]. Peripheral blood lymphocytes were then added in the ratio of 400 to one and after 48 hours incubation at  $37^{\circ}$ C the remaining adherent hepatocytes were counted. Lymphocytes from all of 15 patients with untreated chronic active hepatitis have shown significantly increased cytotoxicity as have those from 21 of 25 treated cases whose liver biopsy still showed piecemeal necrosis of periportal hepatocytes (Figure 3). Addition of 0.5  $\mu$ g of purified LSP to the incubation wells specifically inhibited the cytotoxic reaction indicating that LSP was the principal target antigen on the liver cell membrane [7].

Cytotoxic lymphocytes have been detected less frequently in treated patients whose liver biopsy no longer showed evidence of disease activity, only four of 17 showing significant lymphocyte cytotoxicity for the isolated hepatocytes (Figure 3). In fact, this assay has proved to be superior to other immunological and biochemical tests in predicting the disease activity as assessed histologically [8].

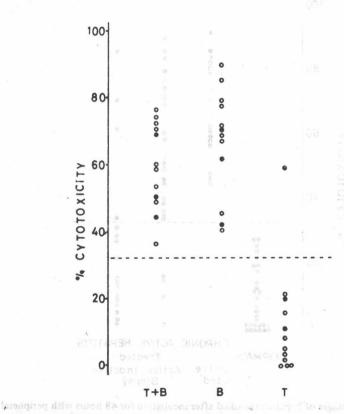


Figure 4 Effect of removal of T cells (B cell enriched fraction) or of B and K cells (T cell enriched fraction) on lymphocyte cytotoxicity to isolated hepatocytes. The lymphocytes were from the peripheral blood of patients with uncontrolled or untreated chronic active hepatitis. (From Cochrane et al 1976 [9]).