

PRACTICE OBSERVED

Practice Research

Polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis in a Cambridge general practice

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to establish the incidence and prevalence of polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis in general practice...

Introduction

Polymyalgia rheumatica and giant cell arteritis occur predominantly in elderly people and rarely occur in people aged under 50...

We therefore decided to study the incidence and prevalence of polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis in general practice...

Patients and methods

A general practice located in a suburban health centre that has an even distribution of social classes and a list of 500 patients was studied...

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Appendix 2

Criteria for diagnosis of polymyalgia rheumatica

- (1) Shoulder and pelvic girdle pain which was primarily muscular in the absence of true muscle weakness. (2) Morning stiffness. (3) Duration of at least two months unless treated...

Criteria for diagnosis of giant cell arteritis

- (1) Positive temporal artery biopsy or cranial artery tenderness noted by a physician. (2) One or more of the following: visual disturbance, headache, jaw claudication, cerebrovascular insufficiency...

Ear wax and otitis media in children

ANNE FAIREY, C B FREER, D MACHIN

Abstract

A study was designed to find the prevalence of ear wax in children aged 3 to 10 years and to test the belief that large amounts of wax are unlikely to be seen when otitis media is present...

Introduction

Among general practitioners there is a widely held belief that if the drum is obscured from view by wax then a child is unlikely to have otitis media...

A study suggested that the amount of wax in an ear was of no diagnostic value in otitis media but also concluded that wax was most removed when otitis media was suspected...

Methods

To determine the prevalence of ear wax children aged 3 to 10 years who attended the health centre for any reason were studied. The health centre is situated among several private and council housing estates on the outskirts of Southampton...

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Interview appendix 1 by one of two rheumatologists was used to ascertain cases. The questionnaire had been shown in a previous study to have a specificity of 92%...

Results

A total of 579 (89%) people completed the questionnaire. Twenty of the non-responders were considered to be unavailable by their general practitioner...

Table 1: Response rate by age and sex

Table with columns for Age, Sex, and Response rate. Rows for 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74.

All previously diagnosed patients were then identified from the practice registers. Polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis had been diagnosed in 19 people in the practice in the previous eight years...

There were 19 patients with polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis in the practice: two detected as a result of the study and 17 diagnosed in the preceding eight years...

Thus there were 19 patients with polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis in the practice: two detected as a result of the study and 17 diagnosed in the preceding eight years...

Table 2: Prevalence by age and sex

Table with columns for Age range and sex, and Prevalence/1000. Rows for 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74.

giant cell arteritis occurs more commonly in women. In the absence of data about changes in the practice population during the preceding eight years, it is possible only to estimate the incidence during this period...

Discussion

This is the first study based on an active detection programme of the occurrence of polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis in general practice. There are thus no comparable data with which to assess the wider application of these results...

There is other evidence that the true incidence of polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis is higher than the results of hospital studies suggest. In 1973 Osberg examined 889 routine postmortem cases...

The results from our study support the view that hospital studies have appreciably underestimated the incidence of polymyalgia rheumatica/giant cell arteritis. Half the cases were diagnosed and treated by the general practitioners and not referred to hospital...

In this study the use of the questionnaire detected only two new cases, and none of the other cases had been missed by the general practitioners in this practice. Thus the use of this questionnaire in screening was of limited benefit...

References

1. McQueen H, Haxby R. Polymyalgia rheumatica: a study of 100 cases with particular reference to the laboratory findings. J Rheumatol 1974;1:190-202.

Table 1 shows that the prevalence of ear wax for the left ear, right ear, and both ears tends to decrease, though erratically, with age. There is no difference in prevalence between boys and girls...

Table 1: Number of children and prevalence of ear wax by age

Table with columns for Age (years), Ear wax (Left, Right, Both), and Total. Rows for 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10.

Table 2: Association between ear wax and otitis media

Table with columns for Otitis media (None, Left ear, Right ear, Both ears), Ear wax (None, Left ear, Right ear, Both ears), and Total No. Rows for 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10.

Applying Rosner's method gave the 'effective number of ears' as 1.26 per child and the probabilities of significant ear wax as 0.56, 0.43, 0.35, and 0.34 for neither ear, left, right, or both ears having otitis media...

Discussion

Surprisingly little is known about the function of ear wax, its prevalence, or its relation to disease of the ear, and the only widely

accepted theory is that it acts as a 'trap' for dust and other particles entering the ear canal. Though we emphasize that we did not study a random sample of children and that the study was confined to the winter months, the prevalence of appreciable (grades 3 and 4) amounts of ear wax was 43%...

The study periods were chosen in an attempt to coincide with the peak incidence of otitis media, and roughly a quarter of all the children in the study had otitis media. Most cases were unilateral—a higher proportion than might be expected for what is often taught as a bilateral disease...

The mechanism behind the observed decrease of ear wax in children with otitis media remains unclear. Schwartz *et al* found the melting point of wax to be above 45°C. It is possible that a transudate from an inflamed drumhead contains cerumenolytic properties...

We thank Dr Ann-Louise Kinmonth for help in planning this study.

References

1. Schwart M, Rodriguez H, McKeown H, Garza M. Cerumenolysis: how occurs it in otitis media? Med Hypotheses 1983;1:137-138.

100 YEARS AGO

The initiative undertaken by Mr. Durham, in proposing that seven delegates from the College of Surgeons should advise an equal number of delegates from the College of Physicians to a conference...

attained. The Colleges having instituted this constant examination, it is held to be desirable that they should be entitled to confer the title of Doctor, to which a twofold examination, qualifying adequately in the whole range of medicine and surgery, should naturally lead...