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PROCEEDINGS

The Official Journal of Regional and State Allergy Societies

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Advances in the Treatment of Allergic and Nonallergic Rhinitis (Symposium)

- 185 **Demographics and epidemiology of allergic and nonallergic rhinitis**
Russell A. Settipane, M.D.
- 191 **Treatment update: Allergic rhinitis**
William E. Berger, M.D., M.B.A.
- 199 **Treatment update: Nonallergic rhinitis**
Phil Lieberman, M.D.
-
- 203 **Future advances of immunotherapy**
Harold S. Nelson, M.D.
- 209 **Herbal therapies: What allergist-immunologists should know regarding patient use of complementary and alternative medicine**
Marianne Frieri, M.D., Ph.D.
- 217 **Combination therapy of bronchial asthma**
Harold S. Nelson, M.D.
- 221 **How to avoid fraud and abuse by following compliance guidelines**
Richard W. Honsinger, M.D.
- 225 **Occupational asthma: A practical approach**
Mark S. Dykewicz, M.D.
- 235 **Diagnostic approach and management of occupational asthma by persulfate salts in a hairdresser**
Gaspar Gala Ortiz, M.D., Santiago Q. Gancedo, M.D., Ph.D., Rosario F. Ordóñez, M.D., Ignacio P. Camo, M.D., Eloina G. Mancebo, M.D., Manuela C. Agustín, M.D., Ph.D., and Eloy L. Cosmes, M.D., Ph.D. (Spain)
- 239 **Variations of pollen and mold concentrations in 1998 during the strong El Niño event of 1997-1998 and their impact on clinical exacerbations of allergic rhinitis, asthma and sinusitis**
Henry B. Freye, M.D., John King, Ph.D., and Catherine M. Litwin, R.N.

Research Abstracts Presented at the 39th Annual Scientific Session of the Western Society of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology

- 249 **Successful one-day outpatient rush immunotherapy for fire ant allergy**
P.C. Sharkey, M.D. and M.M. Barret, M.D.
- Efficacy of azelastine nasal spray in allergic and nonallergic rhinitis**
David Cook, M.D.
- Inhibitory effects of azelastine on cytokines**
William Berger, M.D.

Continued on Table of Contents

255 Minutes of state, regional, and local allergy societies

Minutes of the WSAAI 39th Annual Scientific Session—January 24, 2001
Minutes of the RSL Governors Monthly Conference Call—February 13, 2001 and March 27, 2001
Announcement of the New Mexico Allergy Society
RSL Societies Annual Meeting Minutes, March 19, 2001 (AAAAI)
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vol. 22, No. 4
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Advances in the Treatment of Allergic and Nonallergic Rhinitis (Symposium)

- 185 **Demographics and epidemiology of allergic and nonallergic rhinitis**
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Phil Lieberman, M.D.
-
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- 209 **Herbal therapies: What allergist-immunologists should know regarding patient use of complementary and alternative medicine**
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- 217 **Combination therapy of bronchial asthma**
Harold S. Nelson, M.D.
- 221 **How to avoid fraud and abuse by following compliance guidelines**
Richard W. Honsinger, M.D., F.A.A.A.A.I., F.A.C.A.A.I., M.A.C.P.
- 225 **Occupational asthma: A practical approach**
Mark S. Dykewicz, M.D.
- 235 **Diagnostic approach and management of occupational asthma by persulfate salts in a hairdresser**
Gaspar Gala Ortiz, M.D., Santiago Q. Gancedo, M.D., Ph.D., Rosario F. Ordóñez, M.D., Ignacio P. Camo, M.D., Eloína G. Mancebo, M.D., Manuela C. Agustín, M.D., Ph.D., and Eloy L. Cosmes, M.D., Ph.D. (Spain)
- 239 **Variations of pollen and mold concentrations in 1998 during the strong El Niño event of 1997–1998 and their impact on clinical exacerbations of allergic rhinitis, asthma and sinusitis**
Henry B. Freye, M.D., John King, Ph.D., and Catherine M. Litwin, R.N.
-
- Research Abstracts Presented at the 39th Annual Scientific Session of the Western Society of Allergy, Asthma, and Immunology**
- 249 **Successful one-day outpatient rush immunotherapy for fire ant allergy**
P.C. Sharkey, M.D. and M.M. Barret, M.D.
- Efficacy of azelastine nasal spray in allergic and nonallergic rhinitis**
David Cook, M.D.
- Inhibitory effects of azelastine on cytokines**
William Berger, M.D.
- Efficacy of flunisolide aqueous nasal spray compared with azelastine hydrochloride nasal spray in the treatment of perennial allergic rhinitis**
Joshua M. Berlin, M.D., Stanley J. Golden, M.D., Stephanie Teets, M.D., Erik B. Lehman, M.A., and Timothy J. Craig, D.O.
- Activation of CD4 T-cells with mitogens, Candida, and grass allergen**
J.F. Halsey, Ph.D. and Terrance R. Kordash, M.D.
- Relationship between asthma-related emergency department visits and outdoor air pollutants in the Bronx**
G. Hudes, A. Thanjan, L. Bastone, M. Khananashvili, M.D., and D.L. Rosenstreich, M.D.

continued on next page

Allergy and Asthma Proceedings has been selected for listing in
INDEX MEDICUS, MEDLINE, CURRENT CONTENTS, and EXCERPTA MEDICA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Vol. 22, No. 4
July–August 2001

-
- Evaluation of administration of intravenous gammaglobulin in immunodeficient patients in a private practice setting**
B.V. Kettelhut, T.A. Burns, J.M. Tracy, and R.H. Kobayashi
- Reactions to Hylan G-F20 (Synvisc) in patients receiving intraarticular injections for osteoarthritis**
R.H. Kobayashi, M.D., T. Burns, R.N., and C.M. Kelly, M.D.
- Fluticasone propionate/salmeterol combination versus adding montelukast to low-dose fluticasone**
K.A. Rickard, M.D., N.L. Church, M.S., A.H. Emmett, M.S., and K. Knobil, M.D.
- Low-dose fluticasone propionate vs. montelukast in asthma patients**
K.A. Rickard, M.D., S.P. Goode-Sellers, B.S., L.E. Edwards, Ph.D., S.H. Srebro, M.D., and C.J. Kalberg, Ph.D.
- Montelukast alone or in combination with loratadine: an analysis of three seasonal allergic rhinitis studies**
W.W. Stroms, M.D., S. Lu, M.P. Malice, K. Malmstrom, C. LaForce, J. Wolfe, E. Meltzer, T.F. Reiss, and The Montelukast Spring Allergic Rhinitis Study Group
- Basketball urticaria/angioedema**
S.J. Tkachyk, M.D., F.R.C.P.C.
- Levalbuterol improves outcomes and patient care costs compared to albuterol in hospitalized patients**
T. Truitt, J. Witko, and M. Halpern
- Doses of extrafine HFA-BDP aerosol supported by clinical efficacy review**
G. Gross and J. Vanden Burgt
- A high-potency steroid and a high-deposition steroid in the treatment of asthma: is there a difference in asthma control?**
A.J. Fairfax, M. Aubier, and J. Vanden Burgt
-

- 255 Minutes of state, regional, and local allergy societies**
Minutes of the WSAAI 39th Annual Scientific Session—January 24, 2001
Minutes of the RSL Governors Monthly Conference Call—February 13, 2001 and March 27, 2001
Announcement of the New Mexico Allergy Society
RSL Societies Annual Meeting Minutes, March 19, 2001 (AAAAI)
Announcement of the Western Society of Allergy, Asthma and Immunology

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Treatment Update: Nonallergic Rhinitis

Phil Lieberman, M.D.

ABSTRACT

Chronic nonallergic rhinitis is a diagnosis of exclusion. The pathophysiology underlying this disorder is unknown. There probably are several mechanisms involved and several different variations of this condition. Therapies which have been approved for use in the treatment of chronic nonallergic rhinitis include topical corticosteroids and azelastine. Topical corticosteroid preparations that have received approval are fluticasone, budesonide, and beclomethasone. Topical nasal saline also has been established as a beneficial adjunct to therapy in some instances. Other therapies have included capsaicin, silver nitrate, botulin toxin, and various surgical procedures. These procedures include turbinate reduction, which has been performed by a number of techniques including submucosal diathermy, cryosurgery, laser cauter, and classic resection. Ethmoidal and vidian neurectomies have been performed by excision, diathermy, and cryotherapy. These procedures have met with varying degrees of success. (Allergy and Asthma Proc 22:199-202, 2001)

Rhinitis is defined as an inflammation of the lining of the nose and is characterized clinically by one or more of the following symptoms: rhinorrhea, sneezing and nasal itching, congestion, and postnasal drainage.

The diagnosis of chronic nonallergic rhinitis is made by exclusion. There is no generally accepted definition and therefore there is a lack of consensus regarding terminology.

From the [Departments of Medicine and Pediatrics, Division of Allergy and Immunology, University of Tennessee, Memphis, Tennessee, USA]

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There are no characteristic physical findings and therefore a diagnosis is based mainly on the patient's complaints. The term should refer to any form of chronic rhinitis that is not caused by allergic disease. A classification of the forms of nonallergic rhinitis suggested by Settignano¹ is noted in Table I.

EPIDEMIOLOGY

Statistics on the incidence and demographics of nonallergic rhinitis are difficult to evaluate. There are at least five studies in the literature that have investigated this issue²⁻⁶ (Table II).

Mullarkey *et al.*,² Enberg,³ Togias,⁴ and a joint task force each evaluated the incidence of nonallergic rhinitis as patients with this condition presented to the allergist's office. Mullarkey *et al.*² found that 52% of 142 rhinitis patients had nonallergic rhinitis. Enberg³ evaluated 152 adults and found a 30% incidence of perennial nonallergic rhinitis. Togias⁴ found that 17% of 362 rhinitis patients had the nonallergic variety of this condition. A joint task force (National Rhinitis Classification Task Force) of several allergists surveyed 975 patients and found that 23% had nonallergic rhinitis. In addition, they found that 34% of the subjects had a combination of allergic and nonallergic disease (mixed rhinitis).⁵ The European Community Respiratory Health Survey (ECRHS)⁶ took a different approach. They performed a general population survey and selected 1412 subjects based on the fact that they had a history suggesting rhinitis. They found that 25% of 1400 subjects complaining of rhinitis suffered from the nonallergic variety.

Of course, it is "risky" to extrapolate a general incidence from these data. However, the incidence ranged from 17 to 52%. Thus, using a rough incidence of 33% and considering that there are probably 50 million individuals suffering from rhinitis in the United States, one could conclude that perhaps 17 million of these suffer from the chronic nonallergic variety of this condition. Probably an additional one-third has a mixture of both allergic and nonallergic disease. Thus,

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