

Effects of Recombinant Human Erythropoietin Therapy on Blood Coagulation and Fibrinolysis System

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This study was designed to examine the effects of recombinant human erythropoietin (rHuEPO) therapy on blood coagulation and fibrinolysis in patients scheduled for elective heart surgery and undergoing preoperative autologous blood donation. Twenty-seven patients were studied, of whom 16 patients received rHuEPO (group E) and 11 patients no rHuEPO therapy (group N). The patients in group E were given 6000 units of rHuEPO intravenously every other day, three times a week, beginning from two weeks prior to the operation. In both groups, 400 ml of blood was collected preoperatively for predeposit once a week for two weeks, and the self-donated blood was returned to the patient intra- and postoperatively. Blood samples were drawn at the beginning of the study, immediately before the operation and two weeks after the operation. They were analyzed to assess blood coagulation, fibrinolysis, platelet function and vascular endothelial cell function, in order to examine the effects of the administration of rHuEPO. No significant difference was observed between the two groups in the degree of changes in these parameters following the operation. As enhancement of blood coagulability and fibrinolytic activity was evident postoperatively in both groups, changes in these parameters during the preoperative autologous blood donation period were also assessed excluding the postoperative data. Again, there was no significant intergroup difference in any of the markers evaluated. It was concluded that the administration of rHuEPO during preoperative autologous blood donation is unlikely to affect coagulation and fibrinolysis. (Ann Thorac Cardiovasc Surg 2001; 7: 273-7)

Key words: erythropoietin, blood coagulation, fibrinolysis, heart surgery, autologous blood donation

Introduction

In cardiac operations, preoperative autologous blood donation is positively undertaken in recent years to minimize homologous blood transfusion, and the hemopoi-

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etic factor erythropoietin (recombinant human erythropoietin; rHuEPO) is now generally used to correct anemia associated with the collection of autologous blood.^{1,2)} However, there have been reports describing the occurrence of shunt troubles, dialyzer disorders or a slight increase in platelet count in hemodialysis patients receiving rHuEPO.^{3,4)} There also have been reports describing the development of cerebral infarction or pulmonary infarction in patients having undergone preoperative autologous blood donation with the use of rHuEPO.⁵⁾ These reports have raised apprehensions for a potential risk of enhanced blood coagulation due to administration of rHuEPO. Articles dealing with the effects of rHuEPO therapy in patients with renal failure undergoing or prior

to the induction of hemodialysis have appeared in the literature,^{6,7)} but such studies on autologous blood donation are few. This study was performed to assess the effects of rHuEPO therapy on blood coagulation and the fibrinolytic system in patients undergoing autologous blood donation prior to elective cardiac surgery.

Materials and Methods

The patients scheduled for elective open heart surgery and presumably requiring blood transfusion of 800 to 1200 ml were selected for this investigation. The additional inclusion criteria were as follows; patients aged between 20 and 69 years and weighing from 40 kg up to 80 kg, with no laboratory evidence of iron deficiency (male: serum ferritin ≥ 15 ng/ml; serum iron ≥ 60 $\mu\text{g/dl}$, and female: serum ferritin ≥ 10 ng/ml; serum iron ≥ 40 $\mu\text{g/dl}$) and with pre-study hemoglobin concentrations of 12.0 g/dl to 14.0 g/dl. The patients with a history of thromboembolism and those with blood coagulation abnormalities were excluded from this study.

There were 27 patients fulfilling the above inclusion criteria, of whom 15 patients were to receive coronary artery bypass grafting (CABG), seven patients to receive valvular surgery and the remaining five patients to receive other surgical treatments. The nature of the study was fully explained to each patient, written consent was obtained, and the patients were randomly divided into two study groups by means of sealed envelopes. As a result, 16 patients were to receive rHuEPO (group E) and 11 patients to be given no such medication (group N).

Patients in group E were given 6000 units of rHuEPO (epoetin β ; Chugai Pharmaceutical, Tokyo, Japan) intravenously every other day, three times a week, beginning from two weeks prior to the operation. Both groups received an oral iron preparation (200 mg/day). 400 ml of blood was collected for predeposit once a week for two weeks, and the self-donated blood was preserved in liquid form and returned to the patient intra- and postoperatively.

Subjects Studied

Background characteristics of the patients were compared between the two groups, including gender, age, body weight, hemoglobin concentration at the start of the study, volume of preoperative autologous blood donation, duration of the operation, intra- and postoperative blood

losses and proportion of cases with homologous blood transfusion. Blood samples were drawn at the beginning of the study, immediately before the operation and two weeks after the operation. They were subjected to hematological and biochemical tests and to tests of blood coagulation and the fibrinolytic system, in order to assess the effects of the administration of rHuEPO. Test parameters for the assessment of effects on the coagulation and fibrinolytic system included prothrombin time (PT), activated partial thromboplastin time (APTT), fibrinogen, thrombin-antithrombin III complex (TAT), plasmin- $\alpha 2$ plasmin inhibitor complex (PIC), tissue plasminogen activator (tPA), fibrin degradation product (FDP) D-dimer, β -thromboglobulin (β -TG), platelet factor 4 (PF4), thrombomodulin (TM), von Willebrand factor (VWF), CD62, CD63, antithrombin III (AT III), protein C, blood viscosity, and bleeding time.

Numerical data were expressed as mean \pm standard deviation of the mean. Statistical analyses were performed using the Student's t-test, chi-squared test, and two-way repeated measured analysis of variance.

Results

The background characteristics of the patients are shown in Table 1. There was no significant difference between the two groups in respect gender, age, body weight, hemoglobin concentration at the start of the study, volume of preoperative autologous blood donation, duration of operation, intra- and postoperative blood losses or the number of cases with homologous blood transfusion.

Laboratory data on the clotting and fibrinolytic systems are summarized in Table 2. As for any of the parameters of the coagulation system, such as TAT, AT III and protein C, no significant difference was observed between the two groups with respect to the changes before and after the operation. In both groups, TAT significantly increased in values after the operation (group E, $p < 0.001$; group N, $p < 0.001$), indicating enhancement of coagulability after the operation. Changes following the operation were also not significantly different between the two groups in respect to the fibrinolytic system parameters, such as PIC, tPA and FDP D-dimer. Both groups showed significantly increased D-dimer concentrations postoperatively (group E, $p < 0.001$; group N, $p < 0.001$), thus indicating an enhanced fibrinolytic state after the operation. β -TG, PF4, CD62 and CD63 assayed to evaluate platelet aggregation also did not show any signifi-

Table 1. Background characteristics of the study patient population

	Group E (n=16)	Group N (n=11)	p value*
Gender (male : female)	13 : 3	7 : 4	0.305
Age (yrs)	57.8 ± 9.9	57.2 ± 13.6	0.907
Body weight (kg)	63.0 ± 11.7	58.5 ± 8.1	0.244
Pre-therapy Hb (g/dl)	13.1 ± 0.62	13.2 ± 1.01	0.772
Autologous blood donation (ml)	892 ± 185	836 ± 120	0.350
Duration of operation (min)	410 ± 130	443 ± 51	0.452
Blood loss (ml)	980 ± 570	1367 ± 956	0.267
Homogenous blood transfusion	2 cases	3 cases	0.271

*chi-squared test or Student's t-test

Table 2. Coagulation and fibrinolytic assay data

		Initial blood sampling	Immediately before operation	2 weeks after operation	p value*
TAT (gr. E)	(ng/ml)	2.9 ± 2.1	3.8 ± 1.9	15.8 ± 12.7	0.837
TAT (gr. N)		2.8 ± 1.0	2.6 ± 1.8	13.5 ± 7.9	
AT III (gr. E)	(mg/dl)	28.9 ± 6.3	25.7 ± 4.2	26.1 ± 3.7	0.139
AT III (gr. N)		26.5 ± 6.3	26.6 ± 6.0	26.0 ± 5.1	
Protein C (gr. E)	(%)	109.7 ± 18.8	103.1 ± 19.8	96.3 ± 29.8	0.505
Protein C (gr. N)		115.1 ± 28.4	119.1 ± 38.2	98.8 ± 32.0	
PIC (gr. E)	(μg/ml)	1.2 ± 0.4	1.2 ± 0.7	1.5 ± 0.5	0.656
PIC (gr. N)		1.1 ± 0.5	1.3 ± 0.4	1.3 ± 0.5	
tPA (gr. E)	(ng/ml)	5.7 ± 1.7	5.9 ± 3.4	5.7 ± 2.6	0.857
tPA (gr. N)		7.3 ± 2.5	7.0 ± 2.9	7.1 ± 1.9	
D-dimer (gr. E)	(μg/ml)	0.61 ± 0.61	2.10 ± 4.83	9.15 ± 4.69	0.318
D-dimer (gr. N)		0.54 ± 0.66	0.55 ± 0.62	11.01 ± 6.86	
β-TG (gr. E)	(ng/ml)	217.3 ± 65.5	210.5 ± 64.5	242.8 ± 33.8	0.494
β-TG (gr. N)		244.3 ± 39.7	218.0 ± 58.7	231.0 ± 43.4	
PF4 (gr. E)	(ng/ml)	93.4 ± 35.1	92.7 ± 38.7	104.3 ± 19.3	0.721
PF4 (gr. N)		99.0 ± 34.3	98.1 ± 29.7	95.7 ± 30.0	
CD62 (gr. E)	(mfc)	3.9 ± 1.8	4.2 ± 1.9	5.3 ± 1.7	0.265
CD62 (gr. N)		3.2 ± 0.5	7.0 ± 6.3	5.6 ± 2.2	
TM (gr. E)	(ng/ml)	14.3 ± 5.5	15.3 ± 7.9	14.2 ± 4.7	0.176
TM (gr. N)		14.0 ± 2.9	14.1 ± 3.1	16.9 ± 6.2	
VWF (gr. E)	(U/dl)	75.9 ± 19.0	92.5 ± 27.1	94.8 ± 28.7	0.207
VWF (gr. N)		73.8 ± 26.6	92.0 ± 4.02	116.9 ± 40.8	

TAT: thrombin-antithrombin III complex, AT-III: antithrombin III, PIC: plasmin-α2 plasmin inhibitor complex, tPA: tissue plasminogen activator, β-TG: β-thromboglobulin, PF4: platelet factor 4, TM: thrombomodulin, VWF: von Willebrand factor, *two-way repeated measured analysis of variance.

cant intergroup difference. The parameters measured to assess vascular endothelial cell function, such as thrombomodulin (TM), von Willebrand factor (VWF), did not reveal any significant difference between the groups.

We also compared the degrees of changes between the two groups in these parameters during the preoperative period of autologous blood donation, so as to preclude

the substantial influence of surgical intervention reflected in their postoperative values (Table 3). Again, none of the parameters showed any significant intergroup difference.

Discussion

Blood transfusion was formerly thought to be inevitable

Table 3. Changes in makers during preoperative blood donation period

		Group E	Group N	p value*
TAT	(ng/ml)	0.9 ± 1.5	-0.2 ± 2.1	0.141
AT III	(mg/dl)	-3.2 ± 3.7	0.0 ± 4.2	0.050
Protein C	(%)	-6.6 ± 21.9	4.0 ± 39.0	0.430
PIC	(μg/ml)	0.0 ± 0.8	0.2 ± 0.5	0.567
tPA	(ng/ml)	0.2 ± 3.5	-0.3 ± 2.3	0.674
D-dimer	(μg/ml)	1.5 ± 4.9	0.0 ± 0.2	0.260
β-TG	(ng/ml)	-6.8 ± 85.1	-26.3 ± 65.0	0.536
PF4	(ng/ml)	-0.7 ± 50.3	-0.9 ± 35.8	0.993
CD62	(mfc)	0.3 ± 2.9	3.8 ± 6.6	0.263
CD63	(mfc)	0.6 ± 8.1	3.6 ± 6.2	0.460
TM	(ng/ml)	1.1 ± 4.9	0.1 ± 3.4	0.597
VWF	(U/dl)	16.6 ± 27.1	18.2 ± 32.5	0.894

*Student's t-test

in heart operations because the operation involves the use of a cardio-pulmonary bypass machine. It was then demonstrated however, that operations without homologous blood transfusion were feasible by means of pre-donated autologous blood transfusion. In order to avoid adverse effects of homologous blood transfusion such as viral transmission or transfusion-associated graft versus host disease (TA-GVHD), preoperative autologous blood donation has recently become more prevalent. With the use of the human hemopoietic hormone, rHuEPO, which has been proven to be quite effective for correcting anemia associated with autologous blood predeposition, it is now possible to substantially reduce the period of preoperative autologous blood collection. It has, therefore become a common practice at present to perform autologous blood donation with the aid of rHuEPO in the field of cardiac operations in Japan. Meanwhile, there have been reports describing occurrence of shunt troubles, dialyzer disorders or a slight increase in platelet count in hemodialysis patients receiving rHuEPO. There also have been reports describing development of cerebral infarction or pulmonary infarction in patients having undergone preoperative autologous blood donation aided by administration of rHuEPO. These reports have raised concern about the potential risk of enhanced blood coagulation due to the administration of rHuEPO. This study was designed to examine the effects of rHuEPO therapy on blood coagulation and fibrinolysis in patients undergoing autologous blood donation prior to heart surgery.

TAT, AT III and protein C were measured as parameters of blood coagulability, PIC, tPA and FDP D-dimer as parameters of fibrinolytic activity, β-TG, PF4, CD62

and CD63 to assess platelet aggregation, and TM and von Willebrand factor to examine vascular endothelial cell function. The degrees of their changes following the operation were compared between the rHuEPO-treated group and the non-treated group. None of these physiological parameters revealed any significant intergroup difference. Nearly all the reports dealing with the effects of rHuEPO therapy on the coagulation-fibrinolysis system, platelet function or vascular endothelial cell function have pertained to patients with renal failure receiving rHuEPO for the purpose of correcting nephrogenic anemia. Changes observed in various markers of coagulation and fibrinolytic systems in these patients have varied according to those reports and there is no unanimity of views on this problem.⁸⁻¹⁰ As nephrogenic anemia is corrected, platelet function also improves with a consequent shortening of bleeding time,^{11,12} but many reports suggest that such reaction is not directly attributable to rHuEPO.^{13,14} There have been sporadic reports concerning effects of rHuEPO on vascular endothelial cell function,^{15,16} yet much remains to be clarified. Although studies regarding those effects in cases of autologous blood donation are few as yet,¹⁷ there appears to be no article to demonstrate any obvious influence of rHuEPO therapy on the coagulation-fibrinolytic systems.

The present data may involve a considerable bearing of surgical intervention itself since postoperative values for the various markers are also taken into account in their analysis. In fact, significant increases in TAT and D-dimer were observed as compared with preoperative values in both groups. This indicated postoperative enhancement of coagulation and fibrinolysis due to the influence of the surgical operation per se irrespective of

whether rHuEPO was administered or not. Degrees of changes in the various markers observed during the preoperative blood donation period were thus compared between the two groups in order to evaluate the effects of rHuEPO therapy on the clotting-fibrinolytic systems alone, and not including the effects of the operation. Again, there was no significant difference between the two groups in any of the parameters assessed.

It was concluded that the administration of rHuEPO during preoperative autologous blood donation is unlikely to affect coagulation and fibrinolysis.

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