

Preface

Allergy and Clinical Immunology in Israel 2005

IMAJ 2005;7:755

Twenty years ago the Israeli Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology was established, unifying these two fields into one specialty. This step created a new breed of physicians proficient in both the clinical field and research. These specialists treat patients and at the same time continue bench work in the laboratories with the aim of improving patient care and understanding immune mechanisms in health and disease.

This issue of *IMAJ* coincides with the annual meeting of the Israel Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, in Haifa. The Allergy and Immunology section contains contributions by Israeli practicing physicians as well as reviews by eminent immunologists from abroad. The articles mirror the achievements of local specialists in allergy and clinical immunology and attest to international recognition of the high level of research in the field in Israel. Major subjects of clinical immunology – namely allergy, autoimmunity and immunodeficiency – are all represented.

Etzioni in his in-depth review of immunodeficiency depicts and underscores the relativity of the term, stressing that nobody is absolutely immune against all possible pathogens. Thus immunocompetence is a statistical measure of the ability to evade attacks by pathogens. At the other end of the spectrum of clinical immunology, the evolution of an overzealous immune system mistakenly attacking the body's own tissue, leading to autoimmune disease cannot be exemplified better than by the autoimmune lymphoproliferative syndrome described in detail by Fleisher and Oliviera. Chronic urticaria discussed by Bernstein, a common malady severely affecting the quality of life of those afflicted, is still enigmatic although several autoimmune pathogenetic mechanisms have been identified in some patients. These cases, seen primarily by allergologists, represent the importance of the combined specialty of allergy and clinical immunology.

The chicken or the egg: which came first? The question of the sequence of events is forever intriguing; it stirs our imagination, stimulating curiosity and interest in scientific circles. Aries and colleagues do just that in their review on Wegner's granulomatosis.

The association between immune and inflammatory systems in remote but evolutionary similar organs is highlighted by the works of Kivity et al., indicating that type I food reac-

tions, which seem unrelated to the lung, may in fact induce asthma in some of these patients. Worldwide studies reveal an increase in the prevalence of atopy and allergic diseases, with increasing numbers of emergency room visits due to acute asthmatic conditions. Anti-inflammatory controller medications are the mainstay among preventive measures. Rottem and team analyze the trend in Israel of increased numbers of admissions for attacks but reduced re-admissions due to the introduction of controller drugs. Could leukotriene-modifying drugs, a useful anti-inflammatory asthma medication, have an effect on FcεRI-carrying cells, thus modifying the allergic state? This question is addressed by Sade et al., who demonstrate a lack of effect of these pharmacological agents on basophil release.

Many riddles in our field of interest have been resolved. Most measures are simply palliative. However, for some conditions actual effective remedies have been found. Shabo et al., for example, evaluate and prove the feasibility of feeding camel milk to children who are allergic to cow's milk and cannot receive soy formulas. This may well be the solution for such infants residing in camel-rearing countries.

Allergic diseases affecting the lives of an increasing proportion of the population, especially in developed countries, are better understood today. The care of patients with allergic autoimmune disorders has improved considerably, but much remains obscure and additional research is required.

This issue of *IMAJ* should serve to enhance understanding in our field, foster research in our specialty, and increase awareness among medical professionals of achievements in treating patients suffering from immunologic diseases – whether allergic, autoimmune or due to immunodeficiency. The unanswered questions are innumerable and increasing numbers of researchers and clinicians are fired by the challenge of finding some answers. Another serious problem is the high financial and social burden of immunologic and especially allergic diseases. This too requires a solution. We should and can reduce morbidity and mortality from immunologic disorders. A small but important step to achieving this is through the meeting of minds; scientific conferences, as reported here, provide the opportunity for the exchange of ideas and for collaboration, all necessary elements in this endeavor.

Guest Editors

Shlomo Bar-Sela MD

Chairman, Israel Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Allergy Clinic, Meuhedet Health Services, and Occupational and Environmental Unit, Hadassah Medical Center and Hebrew University School of Public Health, Jerusalem, Israel

Mona Iancovici Kidon MD

Allergy and Clinical Immunology Unit and Pediatric Allergy Clinic, Kaplan Medical Center, Rehovot, and Children's Health Center, Clalit Health Services, Rishon LeZion, Israel