Lithium and renal failure revisited

Whether lithium treatment causes renal failure has been a controversial matter, largely because of design flaws in previous studies. As they report in this issue, Bendz et al. tried to provide a better design, using health-care statistics from two regions of Sweden, accounting for almost a third of the country’s inhabitants. In the study population of 2.7 million, 3369 were receiving lithium. Among those treated with lithium, there were 18 patients receiving treatment for end-stage renal disease (ESRD). The prevalence of chronic kidney disease in the lithium population was 1.2%, certainly low but clearly higher than expected. Further, the risk of developing ESRD was higher in the lithium-treated population. See page 219.

Hepatitis B vaccine

Hepatitis B is one of the most serious global health hazards, with a significant fraction of the world population infected. An effective vaccine that does not require complex dosing regimens is sorely needed. The new HB–AS04 elicits rapid and persistent protection. Dialysis patients especially need such long-term protection. In this issue, Surquin et al. conducted a randomized open trial in dialysis patients not previously vaccinated, in which they compared a group vaccinated with three doses of the AS02 version with another group of similar size and composition vaccinated with four doses of the AS04 version. AS02 produced a more rapid and persistent seroprotection. Although both vaccines are based on the recombinant HBV surface antigen, the adjuvants are different. The AS02 formulation in this study provided better and longer protection and required fewer booster shots. See page 247.

Aging and proteinuria in mice

Most mouse laboratory strains are closely related, but having been inbred for tens of generations, each strain represents a homogeneous group. Comparison of these strains could lead to new insights into the causation of disease. As they report in this issue, Tsaih et al. performed a haplotype association analysis on 30 such inbred strains. Simultaneously, the authors assayed the strains’ propensity to develop proteinuria as the mice age. Using high-density arrays of 63,000 single-nucleotide polymorphisms at each time point in the various strains, they identified nine loci. These loci were then compared with the syntenic positions in the human genome. Comparison of these loci with those associated with chronic kidney disease in type I diabetes mellitus showed that two of them were the same. These loci should provide an exciting new hunting ground for searching for a gene that predisposes to kidney disease. See page 201.

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