

Panamerican Congress of Spondyloarthropathies, Cartagena, Colombia, October 20-22, 2005: Latin American Rheumatology Comes of Age!

RAFAEL VALLE, MD, Chairman, PANLAR, Study Group on Spondyloarthropathies – PANGEE, Bogota, Colombia; DAVID YU, MD, University of California, Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California, USA; LUIS R. ESPINOZA, MD, President-elect, PANLAR, Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA

The first Panamerican Congress of Spondyloarthropathies was held in Cartagena, Colombia, October 20-22, 2005. The congress was sponsored by the Colombian Society of Rheumatology and the PanAmerican League of Associations for Rheumatology (PANLAR), organized by Dr. Rafael Valle, Chairman of the Spondyloarthropathy Committee of PANLAR. The primary objective of the congress was to review and discuss the Latin American experience on spondyloarthritic disorders. Over 100 Latin American rheumatologists representing almost every country of Central and South America were in attendance, along with well known spondyloarthropathy experts from Europe and North America. The congress was well organized, with simultaneous translation of all sessions for non-Spanish speakers.

The congress was divided into 4 consecutive sessions, each with one or 2 invited speakers, followed by 4–6 short podium presentations, including an oral presentation of research abstracts.

The opening presentation and keynote address was delivered by Prof. Joachim Sieper of Germany, who discussed the mechanisms of action of biologic agents in ankylosing spondylitis (AS). Prof. Sieper described his group's work on the mechanism of action of tumor necrosis factor- α (TNF- α) and other cytokines in AS; discussed newer research from his laboratory on an experimental model and data from spine research obtained from autopsy material demonstrating the identification of potential antigens derived from cartilage; and reviewed the role of inflammatory mononuclear cells, such as CD 8+ T cells, and also of activated fibroblasts in triggering the inflammatory reaction seen in AS.

The first session dealt with classification, diagnosis, and clinical features of spondyloarthropathy (SpA) and psoriatic arthritis (PsA). Dr. Percival Sampaio-Barros of Brazil presented data from records of a large number of Brazilian patients. His main point was that existing classification criteria including those from Europe and North America, from several different authors and countries, do not clearly reflect the local experience. He emphasized the need for the establishment of local-country based or Latin American criteria for the diagnosis of these disorders. Similar comments were made or

echoed by rheumatologists from other countries including Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Colombia.

In session 1 part 2, other related aspects were discussed. Dr. Jose Maldonado Coco of Buenos Aires, Argentina, discussed the costs of caring for patients with AS. He presented local data emphasizing that, in contrast to other developed countries, direct costs as opposed to indirect costs account for over 50% of costs incurred in the care of AS patients.

Dr. Carlos Pineda from Mexico City, Mexico, reviewed data on magnetic resonance imaging as a new outcome measure in clinical trials in AS. He presented an extensive review of the literature, as well as a cost-effectiveness analysis, benefits, and pitfalls on the use of this imaging technique in the management of AS.

Prof. David Yu from the University of California, Los Angeles, California, presented interesting data obtained in collaboration with colleagues from Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan on the effects of 3 pulses of infliximab in AS. The data he presented, although preliminary, may be useful to rheumatology practitioners who are dealing with the high cost of this agent in the management of AS.

The second session dealt with the pathogenesis of AS. Prof. John Reveille of Houston, Texas, presented an update on the US genetic data on AS. He reviewed extensive data gathered in his laboratory on the association of HLA-B27 antigen and also of different chromosomal loci in AS. He emphasized that genetic aspects contribute up to 50% in the pathogenesis of AS. Additionally, he stressed the need for further studies to clearly define the role played by those genetic markers.

Prof. Robert Inman of Toronto, Ontario, presented an elegant discussion of the role of adaptive and innate immunity in the pathogenesis of reactive arthritis (ReA). He established a coherent link between potential microorganisms and effector systems of the innate (Toll-like receptors) and the adaptive (CD4 and CD8 T cell-derived cytokines) immune systems and clinical expression, e.g., enthesitis and sacroiliitis, in ReA.

Prof. Ruben Burgos of Mexico City, Mexico, then proceeded to review his extensive experience with juvenile SpA.

In part 2 of session 2, selective research abstracts were presented by young Latin American rheumatologists representing

5 countries. Basic and clinical research works on several aspects were delivered. Prizes were awarded to Dr. Liliana Candia of Medellin, Colombia, for her work on the role of Toll-like receptors in PsA; Dr. Consuelo Romero of Bogota, Colombia, for her work on the role of cytokines on AS; and Dr. Francisco Silva on the clinical aspects of PsA in a Chilean population.

Session 3 was devoted to PsA. Dr. Alberto Berman of Tucuman, Argentina, reviewed current concepts of the pathogenesis of PsA, emphasizing the key role played by CD4+ T cells and Th-1 derived cytokines, particularly TNF- α , on pathogenesis.

Prof. Luis Espinoza of New Orleans, Louisiana, gave an overview of disease modifying antirheumatic drugs and biological agents in the treatment of PsA. Dr. Consuelo Romero reviewed the Colombian experience with AS. This group is based at a military hospital and has accumulated extensive experience in a large group of patients, particularly on undifferentiated SpA.

The last portion of session 3 was devoted to clinical and research workshops on different aspects of SpA. The first workshop dealt with clinical metrology outcomes and was moderated by Drs. L. Candia, J. Marquez, and J. Sieper. The second was related to genetic aspects and was moderated by Prof. J. Reveille. The third workshop was organized by the PanAmerican Group for the Study of SpA (PANGLEE) and was moderated by Dr. Rafael Valle. This group, under the auspices of PANLAR, is charged with the development of classification criteria for SpA. Their immediate goal is to gather information in 1000 patients from at least 10 Latin American countries over the next 12 months and to establish a clinical profile for SpA in Latin American patients. Subsequent stud-

ies will look into genetic, immunological, and therapeutic aspects of these disorders.

The fourth and final session of the congress dealt with therapy. Dr. Cesar Pacheco of Mexico presented an overview of the role of nonsteroidal antiinflammatory drugs (NSAID) in the treatment of AS and other SpA. Particular emphasis was given to recent data demonstrating a beneficial aspect of COX-1 and COX-2 NSAID in AS.

Prof. Joachim Sieper gave an overview of TNF blockers in the treatment of AS and other SpA. Newer data on their beneficial effects on clinical and structural damage were presented. The toxicity profile and costs and benefits were also discussed. Dr. Ruben Burgos discussed the recently published ASAS/EULAR recommendations for the management of AS.

In summary, this was a highly interesting and relevant symposium, whose major immediate accomplishments were the following: (1) To allow SpA specialists to attend a workshop on metrology, so that in the future there will be a uniform protocol for physical examination in clinical research; (2) To promote a discussion followed by a decision to generate a continent-wide SpA clinical research study; and (3) To initiate a discussion about a possible continent-wide genome scan study. The formation of an international study group on SpA is evidence of the success of the PANLAR initiative to call attention to this large group of inflammatory articular disorders in Latin American populations. PANLAR is pleased to have made advancements in its profound endeavor to enhance the collaboration of Latin American countries, and thus propel the study of spondyloarthropathies to best serve the people of Latin America.