Is Tocilizumab an Effective Option for Treatment of Refractory Uveitis Associated with Juvenile Idiopathic Arthritis?

CHRISTOPH TAPPEINER, CARSTEN HEINZ, GERP GANSER and ARND HEILIGENHAUS

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To the Editor:

Anti-interleukin 6 receptor (anti-IL-6R) antibodies have been effective in experimental models of autoimmune arthritis, encephalomyelitis, and also uveitis. Tocilizumab (TCZ; RoActemra®, Hoffmann-La Roche, Basel, Switzerland), a fully humanized anti-IL-6R antibody, has been approved for the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. Efficacy has also been shown for systemic-onset juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) and vasculitis. To date, however, no reports have appeared concerning its efficacy in JIA-associated uveitis.

In about one-third of JIA patients with uveitis, eye inflammation runs a severe course and vision-threatening complications develop, and immunosuppressive treatment is required. Because some patients do not respond properly to the widely used disease-modifying antirheumatic drugs (DMARD), including tumor necrosis factor-α (TNF-α) inhibitors, there is a significant need for alternative treatment options. We describe our initial experience with TCZ for treatment of JIA-associated uveitis at a tertiary uveitis and pediatric rheumatology referral center.

Three adult patients (mean age 18.3 yrs) with JIA-associated chronic anterior uveitis (mean duration 8 yrs, range 4–13) with insidious onset of flare and the presence of vision-threatening complications (Table 1) were treated with intravenous TCZ 8 mg/kg body weight at 4-weekly intervals. Written informed consent was obtained from patients for off-label use of TCZ. In all patients the disease had been refractory to high dosages of topical corticosteroids and previous systemic corticosteroid treatment and previous systemic immunosuppression. Dosages were within generally used ranges, e.g., for methotrexate (MTX) 15 mg/m², azathioprine (AZA) 2 mg/kg body weight, adalimumab (ADA) 40 mg biweekly, etanercept (ETA) 0.8 mg/kg body weight weekly, abatacept (ABA) 10 mg/kg body weight monthly.

Table 1. Adult patients with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)-associated uveitis were treated with tocilizumab when refractory to topical corticosteroids and systemic immunosuppression.

Table 2. Response to treatment in adult patients with juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA)-associated uveitis treated with tocilizumab (TCZ) when refractory to topical corticosteroids and systemic immunosuppression. Dosages were within generally used ranges, e.g., for methotrexate (MTX) 15 mg/m², azathioprine (AZA) 2 mg/kg body weight, adalimumab (ADA) 40 mg biweekly, etanercept (ETA) 0.8 mg/kg body weight weekly, abatacept (ABA) 10 mg/kg body weight monthly.

* At time of starting tocilizumab therapy. ** Standardization of Uveitis Nomenclature classification. ANA: antinuclear antigen; RF: rheumatoid factor; ILAR: International League of Associations for Rheumatology.
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