Amphotericin B and 5-Fluorocytosine: In Vitro Effects on Lymphocyte Function

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The effects of amphotericin B, 5-fluorocytosine, and the combination of both drugs on lymphocyte function in vitro were investigated. Amphotericin B, alone or in combination with 5-fluorocytosine, significantly suppressed both spontaneous lymphocyte transformation and the response of lymphocytes to stimulation with streptokinase-streptodornase. 5-Fluorocytosine had no effect on spontaneous or antigen-induced transformation. Lymphocyte responses to the mitogens phytohemagglutinin and concanavalin A were not changed by exposure to amphotericin B, 5-fluorocytosine, or the combination of both drugs. T-lymphocyte receptors for sheep erythrocytes and B-lymphocyte surface immunoglobulin and receptors for complement were not changed by treatment with amphotericin B or 5-fluorocytosine.

Amphotericin B (AmB) is a polyene antibiotic that binds to sterols in the fungal cell membrane, leading to leakage of cell contents and death of the cell (9). 5-Fluorocytosine (5-FC) is a fluorinated pyrimidine which is used almost exclusively in combination with AmB in infections caused by organisms such as *Candida, Torulopsis*, and *Cryptococcus*. Using in vitro assays for T-lymphocyte function and an in vivo murine model of T-cell function, several investigators have indicated that AmB may be immunosuppressive (19; F. L. Delmonico and R. Rubin, Program Abstr. Intersci. Conf. Antimicrob. Agents Chemother. 16th, Chicago, Ill., Abstr. no. 138, 1976; R. H. Rubin, R. B. Colvin, and M. E. Hammond, 17th ICAAC, New York, N.Y., Abstr. no 273, 1977). However, immunostimulatory effects of AmB also have been reported in murine systems (4, 10, 11, 14, 15, 20). The effects of 5-FC and the combination of 5-FC and AmB on the immune system have not been studied.

The effects of these antifungal agents on the immune system may be of great significance in the treatment of patients with fungal diseases. Immunosuppression could be detrimental to successful treatment of fungal infections. On the other hand, immunostimulatory effects of antifungal antibiotics could prove to be a useful adjunct to host defenses against fungi. This study specifically evaluated the effect of AmB, 5-FC, and the combination of both drugs on B- and T-lymphocyte function in vitro.
per ml and 10 and 100 μg of 5-FC per ml. Control cells were incubated with PBS. Zymosan (Sigma Chemical Co., St. Louis, Mo.) was boiled in 10 volumes of 0.9% NaCl, centrifuged at 5,000 × g, washed three times with HBSS, and suspended at a concentration of 1 mg/ml. This suspension was mixed with fresh human serum for 30 min at 37°C (allowing fixation of complement), washed three times with HBSS, diluted to a final concentration of 0.5 mg/ml, and frozen at −70°C in 0.4-ml aliquots (12). Results were expressed as mean disintegrations per minute (DPM) or as the stimulation index, which is the ratio of DPM in stimulated cultures to DPM in control cultures. For each volunteer the dose of antigen or mitogen giving the maximum response was used for all calculations.

Statistical analysis. The data were evaluated with the Student t test for paired samples.

RESULTS

The expression of lymphocyte surface receptors and surface immunoglobulin was not altered by treatment with AmB or 5-FC. The percentages of T and B lymphocytes were the same in control and drug-treated mononuclear cell preparations (Table 1). Trypan blue dye exclusion showed >95% viability of all preparations after the 2-h incubation period with drugs.

Spontaneous lymphocyte transformation was significantly depressed by concentrations of AmB varying from 0.2 to 5.0 μg/ml (P < 0.005) (Fig. 1). Further studies showed that concentrations as low as 0.05 μg of AmB per ml suppressed spontaneous transformation by 40%. The mitogenic response, expressed as DPM, to both PHA and ConA was unchanged by the addition of AmB to the cultures. However, the response to the specific antigen SK-SD was significantly diminished (P < 0.006) by the addition of AmB.

In contrast to AmB, 5-FC, in concentrations from 10 to 200 μg/ml, had no effect on spontaneous transformation, mitogenic response to PHA or ConA, or the response to the specific antigen SK-SD (Fig. 2).

The combination of both AmB and 5-FC appeared to act in a fashion similar to that of AmB alone (Fig. 3). Spontaneous transformation and

<table>
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<th>Drug</th>
<th>Conc (μg/ml)</th>
<th>T lymphocytes (%)</th>
<th>B lymphocytes (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Surface immunoglobulin</td>
<td>C3 receptors</td>
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<td>78.8 ± 2.6</td>
<td>4.2 ± 1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AmB</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>AmB</td>
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<td>77.0 ± 3.8</td>
<td>5.0 ± 1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-FC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>76.5 ± 3.2</td>
<td>5.0 ± 1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-FC</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>74.3 ± 4.2</td>
<td>5.3 ± 1.4</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1. Percentage of T and B lymphocytes after in vitro exposure to AmB and 5-FC
patients with serious fungal infections, we sought to assess the effects of AmB, 5-FC, and the combination of both drugs in a well-defined in vitro system.

In vitro, AmB significantly diminished both spontaneous transformation and the response to the specific antigen SK-SD. These effects occurred at concentrations of drug achievable in humans (3). In contrast to the studies of Tärnvik and Ånsehn (19), we were unable to document an effect on the mitogenic response to PHA and ConA, even at concentrations as high as 10 \( \mu \text{g/ml} \). This differential inhibitory effect on specific antigenic response but not on mitogenic response is similar to that reported after vaccination with live viral vaccines (8, 17) and after treatment with corticosteroids (2, 7) and cytotoxic drugs (1). However, it is possible that this difference could be related to the fact that cultures stimulated with antigens were incubated longer (6 days) than those incubated with mitogens (3 days).

Using different assays for cell-mediated immunity, Rubin et al. have documented immunosuppression in both mice and guinea pigs treated with AmB (16th ICAAC, Abstr. no 138;...
17th ICAAC, Abstr. no 273). Others have shown AmB to be immunostimulatory to murine lymphocyte function both in vitro and in vivo (4, 10, 11). All studies showing AmB to have immunostimulatory effects on lymphocytes have used murine cells; immunostimulation has not been documented using human cells. Perhaps this difference in test systems explains the differing results found between our study and those of others (4, 10, 11).

5-FC had no effect on in vitro lymphocyte responses, and the combination of AmB and 5-FC showed no more suppression of lymphocyte transformation than that found with AmB alone.

Thus, in a well-defined and wholly in vitro system, AmB, but not 5-FC, diminished both spontaneous and antigen-induced lymphocyte transformation. In this system, AmB selectively inhibited transformation to antigen and was not totally immunosuppressive. Whether this in vitro phenomenon has relevance to patients with serious fungal infections requiring AmB treatment is conjectural. Further in vivo studies in animal models of chronic antifungal therapy should be pursued to assess further the immunosuppressive potential of AmB.

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LITERATURE CITED


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