HEART OF THE MATTER

Electrical Ablation and Atrial Fib

In 1949, Sir Henry Cohen, Lord of Birkenhead, delivered an address to the Royal College of Surgeons in London on the surgical approaches to hypoglycemia and hyperinsulinism. In that address, while discussing the advisability of total pancreatectomy for the treatment of these disorders, the chair of medicine at the University of Liverpool stated, "the feasibility of an operation is not the best indication for its performance."

BY SIDNEY GOLDSTEIN, M.D.

While advice like that could be applied to many clinical initiatives that have been carried out in the last half century, a recent American College of Cardiology meeting presentation on the ablation of electrical pathways in the left atrium to prevent atrial fibrillation brought this quote to mind. Although ablation therapy is a long way from becoming a certainty, the attempts to prevent atrial fibrillation with this technique are currently quite the rage among electrophysiologists.

The trench warfare being carried out in the left atrium as we attempt to prevent atrial fibrillation has captured the imagination of the electrophysiology community. It is proposed that the scarred and "debulked" left atrium will be more likely to maintain normal sinus rhythm and will be a less fertile ground for thrombi formation. Whether either of these proposals can be proved remains to be seen.

Atrial fibrillation has become a clinical problem of increasing importance as our population ages. The risks associated with atrial fibrillation lie primarily as a source of systemic emboli, particularly to the brain. Although some patients may experience cardiac symptoms as a result of chronic atrial fibrillation, most patients tolerate it very well.

The Atrial Fibrillation Follow-Up Investigation of Rhythm Management (AFFIRM) study clearly showed that there was little to be gained in regard to morbidity and mortality with the establishment of normal sinus rhythm using antiarrhythmic drugs. The major test of efficacy of therapy in atrial fibrillation is the prevention of stroke.

Many patients are driven to ablation therapy to escape the requirement of long-term anticoagulant therapy with warfarin. Although this is a burden, and is associated to some degree with adverse bleeding, help is on the way.

It is likely that in the next few years that advances in pharmacogenetics of warfarin therapy will provide better insight into which patients will benefit from this treatment. In addition, there is likelihood that oral direct thrombin and factor Xa inhibitors will become available and should make anticoagulant therapy more manageable and safer. It also is important to emphasize that ablation therapy may not exclude the left atrium as a source of cerebral embolism.

It is reasonable to continue research in the ablation in patients who are truly symptomatic as a result of chronic atrial fibrillation. However, we should be cautious in offering ablation therapy as an alternative to warfarin anticoagulation at this time.

We are long way from presuming that this form of therapy will give long-term prevention of atrial fibrillation, and even if it does, the risks of stroke may well persist as a result of the of the scarring of the left atrium that occurs with the therapy. ■

DR. GOLDSTEIN, *medical editor of* CARDIOLOGY NEWS, *is professor of medicine at Wayne State University and division head, emeritus, of cardiovascular medicine at Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit.*

Pravachol Generic Approved by FDA

The first generic version of pravastatin was approved by the Food and Drug Administration in April.

Pravastatin is indicated for treatment of individuals with hyperlipidemia or for patients who are at elevated risk for atherosclerosis-related cardiovascular adverse events in which high cholesterol levels are a factor.

Pravastatin was the third highest-selling statin in the United States in 2005, with sales totalling $1.7 billion, according to IMS Health, a pharmaceutical consulting firm.

Bristol-Myers Squibb's patent for the drug, marketed as Pravachol, expired on April 20, and 180-day exclusivity was granted to Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., one of the world's largest generic pharmaceutical companies, for the marketing of generic pravastatin tablets in 10-, 20-, and 40-mg quantities.

Shipment of these products will begin immediately, according to the company. In fact, the tablets were found available in May at a Rockville, Md., pharmacy, priced 20% below Pravachol.

"This approval is another example of our agency's endeavor to counter rising health care costs by approving safe and effective generic alternatives as soon as the law permits," Dr. Scott Gottlieb, FDA deputy commissioner for medical and scientific affairs, said in a statement.

"Pravastatin is a widely used cholesterol-lowering agent, and its generic version can bring significant savings to millions of Americans," Dr. Gottlieb added.

—Mark S. Lesney

Cardiology News

President, IMNG Alan J. Imhoff

Executive Director, Editorial Mary Jo M. Dales
Executive Editor, IMNG Denise Fulton
Executive Editor, EGMN Kathy Scarbeck

Publication Editor Catherine Hackett
Publication Associate Editor Renée Matthews
Senior Editors Kathryn DeMott, Gwendolyn B. Hall, Gina L. Henderson, Sally Koch Kubetin, Teresa Lassman, Mark S. Lesney, Catherine Cooper Nellist, Calvin Pierce, Terry Rudd, Robin Turner, Elizabeth Wood
Associate Editors Alicia Ault, John R. Bell, Lori Buckner-Farmer, Christina Chase, Jay C. Cherniak, Richard Franki, Deeanna Franklin, Randall Frey, Joyce Frieden, Nancy Nickell, Amy Pfeiffer
Graphics Editor Nicole E. Schofer
Bureaus Betsy Bates (Los Angeles), Sherry Boschert (San Francisco), Doug Brunk (San Diego), Bruce K. Dixon (Chicago), Robert Finn (San Francisco), Bruce Jancin (Denver), Kate Johnson (Montreal), Timothy F. Kirn (Sacramento), Fran Lowry (Orlando), Jane Salodof MacNeil (Southwest), Diana Mahoney (New England), Damian McNamara (Miami), Michele G. Sullivan (Mid-Atlantic), Nancy Walsh (New York), Patrice Wendling (Chicago), Sharon Worcester (Southeast), Mitchel L. Zoler (Philadelphia)
Senior Writers Jeff Evans, Elizabeth Mechcatie, Mary Ellen Schneider, Heidi Splete, Miriam E. Tucker, Kerri Wachter
Contributing Writers Nellie Bristol, Christine Kilgore, Mary Ann Moon
Copy Chief Felicia R. Black
Assistant Copy Chief Carol Nicotera-Ward
Copy Editors Therese Borden, Julia Duncan, Virginia Ingram-Wells, Jane Locastro, Arlene Sheir-Allen, Leanne Sullivan
Editorial Offices 5635 Fishers Lane, Suite 6000, Rockville, MD 20852, 800-445-6975, cardiologynews@elsevier.com

Executive Director, Operations Jim Chicca
Director, Production/Manufacturing Yvonne Evans
Production Manager Judi Sheffer
Production Specialists Anthony Draper, Thomas Humphrey, Rebecca Slebodnik, Mary D. Templin
Information Technology Manager Doug Sullivan
Senior Systems Administrator Lee J. Unger
Systems Administrator Drew Mintz
Operations Assistant Melissa Kasimatis
Art Director Louise A. Koenig
Assistant Design Supervisor Elizabeth B. Lobdell
Design Staff Sarah L. Gallant, Forhad S. Hossain, Julie Keller, Yenling Liu, Angie Ries
Photo Editors Vivian E. Lee, Sherilyn M. Mattes, James E. Reinaker
Project Manager Susan D. Hite
Assignments Coordinator Megan Evans
Departmental Coordinator Vicki Long
Editorial Coordinator Daniela Silva
Address Changes Fax change of address (with old mailing label) to 240-221-2543 or e-mail change to subs@elsevier.com

V.P., Med. Ed./Bus. Development Sylvia H. Reitman
Program Managers, Med. Ed. Sara M. Hagan, Malika Wicks
Senior Director, Marketing/Research Janice Theobald
Marketing Associate Jennifer Savo
Sales Director Mark E. Altier
Executive Director, Business Operations Bari Edwards
Bus. Manager Dennis Quirk
Adv. Services Manager Joan Friedman
Credit Supervisor Patricia H. Ramsey
Manager, Administration/Conventions Lynne Kalish
Receptionist Linda Wilson
National Account Managers Sue Fagan, 973-290-8226, s.fagan@elsevier.com; Barbara Napoli, 973-290-8224, b.napoli@elsevier.com; Christy Tetterton, 973-290-8231, c.tetterton@elsevier.com
Advertising Offices 60 Columbia Rd., Bldg. B, Morristown, NJ 07960, 973-290-8200, fax 973-290-8250
Classified Sales Manager Robin Cryan, 212-633-3160, r.cryan@elsevier.com
Classified Advertising Offices 360 Park Ave. South, 9th Floor, New York, NY 10010, 800-379-8785, fax 212-633-3820
Reprints Call 240-221-2419

POSTMASTER Send changes of address (with old mailing label) to Circulation, CARDIOLOGY NEWS, 5635 Fishers Lane, Suite 6000, Rockville, MD 20852.

CARDIOLOGY NEWS (ISSN 1544-8800) *is published monthly by Elsevier Inc., 60 Columbia Rd., Building B, Morristown, NJ 07960, 973-290-8200, fax 973-290-8250. Subscription price is $80.00 a year. Periodicals postage paid at Morristown, NJ, and additional offices.*

CARDIOLOGY NEWS is an independent newspaper that provides the practicing specialist with timely and relevant news and commentary about clinical developments in the field and about the impact of health care policy on the specialty and the physician's practice.

ELSEVIER

INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL NEWS GROUP

AMERICAN BUSINESS MEDIA ABM

BPA WORLDWIDE