



April 2012

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## Recommended Citation

Habib, A., Rohra, D., Saghir, S., Udani, S., Wood, R., Jabbar, A. (2012). Response of a single 'mega intramuscular dose' of vitamin D on serum 25OHD and parathyroid hormone levels. *JCPSP: Journal of the College of Physicians and Surgeons Pakistan*, 22(4), 207-212.

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# Response of a Single 'Mega Intramuscular Dose' of Vitamin D on Serum 25OHD and Parathyroid Hormone Levels

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## ABSTRACT

**Objective:** To determine the changes produced in serum 25OHD and iPTH levels after 600,000 IU of injection cholecalciferol in volunteers.

**Study Design:** Interventional study.

**Place and Duration of Study:** Section of Chemical Pathology, Department of Pathology and Microbiology, the Aga Khan University Hospital, Karachi, from June 2009 - June 2010.

**Methodology:** Volunteers of either gender aged 18-40 years with known 25OHD, calcium (Ca), creatinine (Cr) and phosphorous (P) levels were included in the study. Subjects on therapy like vitamin D and calcium supplements, corticosteroids or anti-epileptic medicines, primary hyperparathyroidism and hypercalcaemia, with co-morbidity like renal failure, liver disease and history of malabsorption, diarrhea or hyperthyroidism were excluded. All volunteers were given an intramuscular injection of vitamin D3 (cholecalciferol, 600,000 IU). After 8 weeks, serum 25OHD, iPTH, Ca and P levels were determined again. For 25OHD level, cut-off of  $\leq 50$  nmol/l was defined as deficient, 50-75 nmol/l as insufficient and  $\geq 75$  as optimal level.

**Results:** Mean 25OHD and iPTH levels were  $35.06 \pm 16.6$  nmol/l and  $81.15 \pm 76.78$  pg/ml respectively at baseline. Seventeen volunteers were 25OHD deficient. Five had high iPTH levels (25%) (mean  $156 \pm 123.7$  pg/ml). 25OHD and iPTH showed a significant inverse correlation at baseline ( $< 0.01$ ). After 8 weeks of injection vitamin D 25OHD levels became optimal in 6 subjects (35%) [mean  $92.9 \pm 16.6$  nmol/l]. It remained low in 5 volunteers (25%) [mean  $41.6 \pm 9.6$  nmol/l] while insufficient levels were seen in 9 volunteers (40%) [mean  $63.3 \pm 5.8$  nmol/l]. Follow-up mean Ca, P and iPTH were  $2.25$  mmol/l ( $\pm 0.09$ ),  $1.1$  ( $\pm 0.1$ ) and  $47.52$  pg/ml ( $\pm 22.56$ ) respectively. A significant increase in mean 25OHD level was seen at follow-up ( $p < 0.01$ ), while the change in PTH was insignificant ( $p=0.05$ ).

**Conclusion:** Single mega-dose of cholecalciferol achieved optimal levels of 25OHD in 35% of subjects after eight weeks of supplementation.

**Key words:** Vitamin D (25OHD). Vitamin D deficiency (VDD). Parathyroid hormone (PTH). Secondary hyperparathyroidism (sHPTH). Cholecalciferol (vitamin D3).

## INTRODUCTION

Adequate vitamin D (25OHD) and parathyroid hormone (PTH) levels are crucial for bone health. Vitamin D deficiency (VDD) causes a decrease in intestinal calcium absorption and produces secondary hyperparathyroidism (sHPTH) which is the primary mediator of the detrimental effects of VDD on skeleton.<sup>1</sup> Recently, role of sHPTH in producing hypertension and ventricular hypertrophy has been shown. sHPTH has been linked to cardiovascular mortality in patients with heart failure. Potential benefits have been observed after raising the

levels of 25OHD and thus lowering of PTH levels in many chronic diseases.<sup>2-7</sup>

A high prevalence of VDD has been identified in Pakistan in healthy volunteers and medical clinic patients. A great concern was that 94.6% of adults were between 20-30 years old; the age at which peak bone mass is achieved and sHPTH was present in 31% of individuals.<sup>8,9</sup> Recent reports from two different public hospitals in Karachi, demonstrated high prevalence of VDD in pregnant women and their newborns urging for an immediate action to the problem.<sup>10,11</sup>

sHPTH is reversible when 25OHD levels rises, however, the optimal dose of 25OHD needed to normalize PTH is currently taken as 75 nmol/l (32 ng/ml) by most experts.<sup>1,12</sup> In order to correct VDD, the practice pattern of physician varies. Different protocols have been proposed and strategies studied recently for vitamin D supplementation. However, there is no universally accepted regimen and treatment practice.<sup>13-18</sup> A recent trial demonstrated that the dose-response curve of serum 25OHD concentration to the cholecalciferol (vitamin D3) supplementation is widely variable, suggesting that people may respond differently in terms

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Received September 12, 2011; accepted February 20, 2012.

of serum 25OHD increases to a fixed dose of cholecalciferol.<sup>16</sup>

Studies published in recent years have focused mainly on hypovitaminosis D and on the optimal treatment capable of normalizing 25OHD and the dose of cholecalciferol needed to normalize sHPTH.<sup>13-15</sup>

The present study was conducted with the aim of determining the changes produced in serum vitamin D and iPTH levels after a single intramuscular injection of 600,000 IU of cholecalciferol in patient with VDD.

## METHODOLOGY

An interventional study was conducted in the Department of Pathology and Microbiology, the Aga Khan University (AKU) from June 2009 to June 2010. The study was funded by Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan and was approved by Ethical Review Committee (ERC) of the Aga Khan University Hospital (AKUH).

Volunteers of either gender aged 18-40 years whose 25OHD level had been checked within last one week at the clinical laboratory of the AKUH, Karachi were contacted by telephone. The aims of the study were explained to them. On a pre-determined day, the participants were requested to visit the Clinical Laboratory of AKUH. A written informed consent was obtained from all the participating individuals. Before inclusion in the study, it was ensured that the serum creatinine (Cr), calcium (Ca) and phosphorous (P) of the volunteers were within normal limits.

Those volunteers who were taking any drug which could confound the results like vitamin D supplements, corticosteroids or anti-epileptic medicines were excluded from the study. Other exclusion criteria were primary hyperparathyroidism and hypercalcaemia, presence of any other co-morbidity like renal failure, liver disease and history of malabsorption, diarrhea or hyperthyroidism.

All volunteers irrespective of their 25OHD status were given an intramuscular injection of vitamin D3 (Cholecalciferol, 600,000 IU). Two months later, volunteers were contacted and invited again to come to Clinical Laboratory. During this visit their serum 25OHD, intact-PTH (iPTH), Ca and P levels were determined again.

Venous blood was drawn in fasting volunteers between 8:00 - 10:00 am in plain serum tubes for Ca, P and 25OHD, and in EDTA tubes for iPTH analysis. Immediately after phlebotomy, serum was separated from the blood samples by centrifugation, aliquot and preserved for 25OHD and iPTH levels at -20°C until analysis.

25OHD was measured by an electrochemiluminescence immunoassay (ECLIA) performed on Elecsys 2010 (Roche Diagnostics, USA). For quality control, Elecsys Preci Controls in various concentration ranges was run

with each batch. Results were accepted only if the concentration was within the defined limits of the pre-control.

iPTH was measured by a solid-phase, two site chemiluminescent enzyme-labelled immunometric assay on Immulite (Siemens Medical Solutions Diagnostics, USA). Low and high levels of quality control samples of iPTH were run with each batch. Interassay precision (pg/ml) was found to have a range of 8.6%-9.0%.

Ca, P and Cr levels were assessed on Beckman Synchron Cx7 by enzymatic methods; Arsenazo dye method for C, Jaffe reaction for Cr and Phosphomolybdate reaction for P. Low, medium and high Beckman commercial controls were run with every batch as quality control.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) [release 13.0] standard version, copyright © SPSS, was used for data analysis. For 25OHD, cut-off of  $\leq 50$  nmol/l was defined as deficient, 50-75 nmol/l as insufficient and  $\geq 75$  as optimal levels.

Data was checked for normality by histogram. Descriptive analysis was done for demographic and laboratory tests. Percent increase and decrease in 25OHD and iPTH were calculated using standard equations. The data are presented as mean  $\pm$  standard deviation. The association between serum 25OHD and iPTH concentrations was studied by linear regression and correlation. The statistical analysis for the differences in the levels of 25OHD, iPTH, Ca and P before and after vitamin D supplementation was made using paired t-test. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

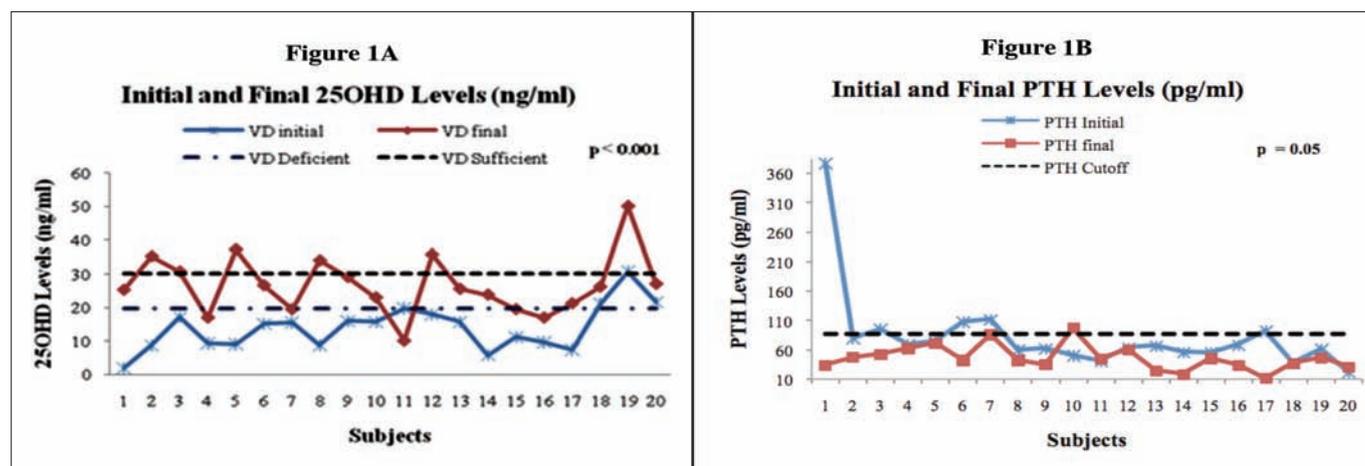
## RESULTS

Twenty volunteers (6 males and 14 females) participated in the study. The mean age of the participants was  $27 \pm 3.5$  years. The mean BMI of males and females was  $26.8 \pm 2.7$  and  $24.1$  kg/m<sup>2</sup>, respectively. Change in serum 25OHD and iPTH values in individual volunteers and their mean values at baseline and at follow-up, 8 weeks after injection Cholecalciferol are shown in Table I and Figure 1.

At baseline, 17 volunteers were deficient in 25OHD with serum levels  $< 50$  nmol/l, one had serum levels of 76.97 nmol/l (optimal  $\geq 75$  nmol/l) and 2 had insufficient 25OHD serum levels (50-75 nmol/l). Mean serum 25OHD levels and iPTH levels were  $35.06 \pm 16.23$  nmol/l and  $81.15 \pm 76.78$  pg/ml, respectively. Five of the volunteers (25%) had high iPTH levels with mean serum levels of  $156 \pm 123.7$  pg/ml. Baseline serum Ca and P levels were within normal range;  $2.3 \pm 0.12$  mmol/l and  $0.9 \pm 0.13$  mmol/l. Serum 25OHD and iPTH showed significant inverse correlation ( $r^2 = 0.187$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) at baseline (Figure 2A).

**Table I:** Percent change in serum 25OHD (nmol/l) and iPTH (pg/ml) levels after 600,000 IU intramuscular injection of cholecalciferol (N = 20).

| Subjects | Pre-treatment | Post treatment | % change     | Pre-treatment | Post-treatment | % change |
|----------|---------------|----------------|--------------|---------------|----------------|----------|
|          | 25OHD         | 25OHD          |              | iPTH          | iPTH           |          |
| 1        | 9.98          | 63.09          | 532.0        | 377.0         | 34.0           | 90.0     |
| 2        | 21.71         | 87.98          | 30.5         | 79m .3        | 47.3           | 40.0     |
| 3        | 42.80         | 76.62          | 79.0         | 94.3          | 52.3           | 44.0     |
| 4        | 22.61         | 92.85          | 310.0        | 68.0          | 62.2           | 8.5      |
| 5        | 37.81         | 66.44          | 75.7         | 73.4          | 71.4           | 2.7      |
| 6        | 38.68         | 48.69          | 25.81        | 107.0         | 42.1           | 60.0     |
| 7        | 22.16         | 84.88          | 232.9        | 111.0         | 85.5           | 22.0     |
| 8        | 40.01         | 72.55          | 81.34        | 58.9          | 42.2           | 28.0     |
| 9        | 14.52         | 59.47          | 309.45       | 61.2          | 35.0           | 42.0     |
| 10       | 28.10         | 48.69          | 73.26        | 49.8          | 97.0           | -94.0    |
| 11       | 24.26         | 42.43          | 74.89        | 39.3          | 45.0           | -14.0    |
| 12       | 18.37         | 53.04          | 188.7        | 62.6          | 60.5           | 3.362    |
| 13       | 76.97         | 124.84         | 62.19        | 66.0          | 24.8           | 62.0     |
| 14       | 54.01         | 67.49          | 24.95        | 54.7          | 18.0           | 67.0     |
| 15       | 23.33         | 42.45          | 81.92        | 54.0          | 45.3           | 16.0     |
| 16       | 39.23         | 57.40          | 46.3         | 67.5          | 33.7           | 50.0     |
| 17       | 49.34         | 25.20          | -48.91       | 91.6          | 11.6           | 87.0     |
| 18       | 44.90         | 89.23          | 98.72        | 36.8          | 36.8           | 0.0      |
| 19       | 39.33         | 63.79          | 62.18        | 60.3          | 46.5           | 22.0     |
| 20       | 52.99         | 65.39          | 23.41        | 21.5          | 30.7           | 42.0     |
| Mean±SD  | 35.06±16.23   | 66.63±24.99    | 134.4±141.87 | 81.0          | 46.0           | 43.0     |
| p-value  | < 0.01        |                | -            | 0.05          |                | -        |



**Figure 1 (A,B):** Response of 25OHD (nmol/l) and iPTH levels (pg/ml) to 600,000 IU of injection cholecalciferol in healthy volunteers in Karachi, Pakistan (n = 20).

**Table II:** Response of 25OHD (ng/ml) and iPTH (pg/ml) to different dosing regimen of Cholecalciferol supplementation in literature.

| VD (IU) | N  | Route | Dosing interval | Baseline |       | 2 months |      | 3 months |      | 4 months |     | 6 months |      | 1 year |      | Ref             |
|---------|----|-------|-----------------|----------|-------|----------|------|----------|------|----------|-----|----------|------|--------|------|-----------------|
|         |    |       |                 | 25OHD    | PTH   | 25OHD    | PTH  | 25OHD    | PTH  | 25OHD    | PTH | 25OHD    | PTH  | 25OHD  | PTH  |                 |
| 1000    | 30 | oral  | Daily           | 23.4     | 92.5  | -        | -    | 49.6     | 70.2 | -        | -   | 57.6     | 66.0 | -      | -    | 16 <sup>∞</sup> |
| 60,000  | 23 | oral  | Weekly *        | 13.5     | 54.0  | 82.4     | 29.0 | -        | -    | -        | -   | -        | -    | 24.7   | 10.9 | 13              |
| 60,000  | 40 | oral  | Weekly***       | 25.4     | -     | 94.5     | -    | -        | -    | -        | -   | 56.0     | -    | -      | -    | 17              |
| 300,000 | 30 | oral  | Monthly**       | 22.0     | 99.9  | -        | -    | 51.4     | 78.0 | -        | -   | 78.2     | 72.9 | -      | -    | 16              |
| 600,000 | 50 | IM    | Single          | 32       | 7.4   | -        | -    | -        | -    | 112.0    | 6.0 | -        | -    | 73.0   | 5.2  | 14              |
| 600,000 | 20 | oral  | Single          | 42.9     | 57.0  | 106.8    | 42.8 | 79.6     | 37.7 | -        | -   | -        | -    | -      | -    | 18 <sup>∞</sup> |
| 600,000 | 40 | IM    | Single          | 22.8     | 122.0 | -        | -    | 69.1     | 24.8 | -        | -   | -        | -    | -      | -    | 15 <sup>∞</sup> |
| 600,000 | 20 | IM    | Single          | 35.06    | 81.0  | 66.7     | 46.0 | -        | -    | -        | -   | -        | -    | -      | -    | This study      |

\* Weekly for 4 months; \*\* Once at baseline and once at 3 months; \*\*\* Weekly for 8 weeks followed by 60,000 IU/month for 4 months.  
<sup>∞</sup> Values of 25OHD from reference 15, 16 & 18 are converted from ng/ml to nmol/l; <sup>∞</sup> Value of iPTH from reference 14 are in pmol/l.

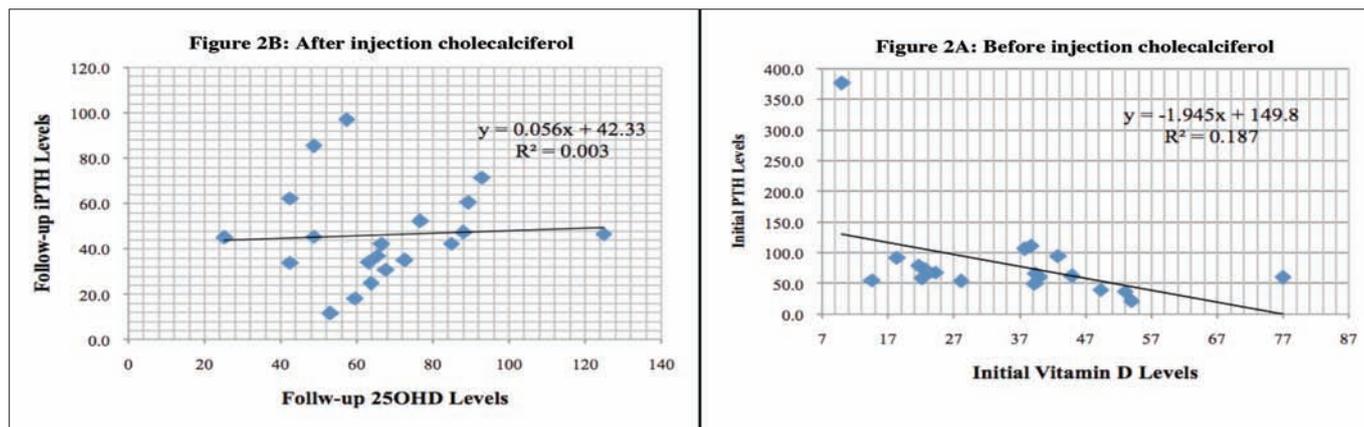


Figure 2 (A,B): Association between 25OHD (nmol/l) and iPTH (pg/ml) before and after 8 weeks of injection cholecalciferol (600,000 IU).

After 8 weeks of injection vitamin D (600,000 IU), serum 25OHD levels became optimal ( $\geq 75$  nmol/l) in 6 volunteers (35%) (mean  $92.72 \pm 16.65$  nmol/l). It remained low in 5 volunteers (25%) (mean  $41.48 \pm 9.62$  nmol/l), while insufficient levels were seen in 9 volunteers (40%) (mean  $63.19 \pm 5.88$  nmol/l). Follow-up mean serum Ca, P and iPTH were  $2.5 \pm 0.10$  mmol/l,  $1.16 \pm 0.13$  mmol/l and  $47.52 \pm 22.56$  pg/ml respectively. In one individual, despite increase in 25OHD levels, the iPTH levels increased.

Mean baseline 25OHD levels ( $35.06 \pm 16.23$  nmol/l) were significantly different from follow-up ( $66.63 \pm 24.99$  nmol/l) 25OHD levels ( $p < 0.01$ ) while significant difference was not seen in baseline ( $81.15 \pm 76.78$  pg/ml) and follow-up ( $47.52 \pm 22.56$  pg/ml) iPTH levels ( $p = 0.05$ ) (Figure 1A and B).

Mean follow-up serum Ca ( $2.5 \pm 0.10$  nmol/l) and P ( $1.1 \pm 0.13$  nmol/l) did not show significant change ( $p = 0.47$  and  $0.46$  respectively) from baseline values of Ca ( $2.3 \pm 0.11$  nmol/l) and P ( $0.9 \pm 0.13$  nmol/l). The inverse correlation seen in the baseline samples between iPTH and 25OHD changed to  $r^2 = 0.03$  (Figure 2B).

## DISCUSSION

In Pakistan, VDD is widely prevalent despite adequate sunshine throughout the year. Serum 25OHD levels observed at baseline in the current study and sHPTH in 25% of the study participants further supported the previous findings and endorsed the wide spread existence of 25OHD deficiency along with sHPTH.<sup>7,8,19-21</sup> With recent greater awareness about VDD, testing for 25OHD has become common in diagnosing and treating VDD.

A controversial aspect in the setup is the treatment strategies of correcting VDD. Several strategies have been reported recently in literature using oral and injectable vitamin D preparations of 1,000-600,000 IU and with variable outcomes (Table II). In a report from

India, pattern of 25OHD response at 2 months and one year interval of giving 60,000 IU of cholecalciferol per week was evaluated in 28 subjects. VDD was corrected in all subjects at 8 weeks with normalization of PTH. However, at one year follow-up all subjects develop VDD with sHPTH, indicating need for ongoing supplementation for sustaining 25OHD levels.<sup>13</sup>

In Karachi, oral vitamin D supplementations are available in combination with calcium supplement with most of the available oral preparations containing 100-125 units of cholecalciferol; only a few contains 400 IU of cholecalciferol. In addition, two depot intramuscular preparations of 200,000 and 600,000 IU of cholecalciferol are also available. Treatment of VDD with oral preparations is much more expensive as compared to injections.

Practice patterns of physicians in treating VDD are also widely variable,<sup>20</sup> with some physicians prescribing two injections one month apart while others prescribe 3 injections of vitamin D at two weekly intervals. Another practice is to give 600,000 units intramuscularly every 3 months; cases have been seen (personal observation) in which alternate day injections of 600,000 IU have been prescribed for 1-2 months. At the same time, some physicians treat the patients with severe VDD with low dose oral preparation and hence results in treatment failure. Very few physicians perform complete biochemical testing to assess the response to sHPTH associated with VDD and insufficiency to vitamin D replacement. The effects of these mega doses have not been studied in our setting and practices are based on individual experiences. Information regarding effective correction of VDD with currently available depot preparation is lacking in our population. In Pakistani immigrant in Denmark recently, effects of low dosages of 400 and 800 IU/day (10 and 20  $\mu$ g/day) were studied at 6 and 12 months after intervention. Increases in 25OHD were observed in study participants, but optimal levels were not achieved. However, this degree of intervention did not have any significant effect on bone turnover

marker and DEXA measurement.<sup>23</sup> While, in another study a dose of 22 µg/day of vitamin D increased the serum concentration to optimal levels in white young adult women residing in Orono, Maine.<sup>24</sup> Higher intakes are recommended for South Asian populations,<sup>12,23</sup> but the controversy remains about which concentration of serum 25OHD should constitute the lower limit of adequacy especially for South Asian population. Deficiency is defined as the 25OHD level below which serum PTH concentration increases. Estimates of 25OHD required for maximal suppression of PTH varies. However, the most widely acceptable cutoff is 75 nmol/l (30 ng/ml).

In a study conducted in Sydney to assess the efficacy and safety of annual 600,000 IU of cholecalciferol for treatment of VDD, 50 vitamin D-deficient participants were evaluated at baseline and after 4 and 12 months of therapy. Significantly higher levels of 25OHD were seen at 4 months, and 12 months compared with baseline while there was a 30% decline in PTH levels at 12 months. 25OHD levels increased by 128% over 12 months. Recommendations were made to further assess the efficacy of this mega dose as it is cost effective as compared to oral forms of treatment, and have simple dosing regimen thus improving patient compliance.<sup>14</sup>

On the other hand, in another study conducted in Qatar, Doha, 37 out of 40 adolescents before, 3 and 6 month after treatment with a single mega dose of cholecalciferol showed mean levels of 67.3 nmol/l with significant improvements in symptoms for 3 months. Recommendations from this study support the effectiveness of this dose of VD for 3 months.<sup>15</sup>

In this study, vitamin D levels were optimally achieved in 35% of the subjects post-injection. There is wide variation in the biochemical response to vitamin D injections (Table I). Though the change in 25OHD level in baseline and follow-up is statistically significant; but the baseline and post-injection mean change in iPTH is not statistically significant with a single mega dose.

Further research is needed at different follow-up intervals to assess the effectiveness of vitamin D therapy and to determine how much vitamin D is required to optimize serum 25OHD status throughout the year for optimal physiological functioning.

We recommend that a single mega dose of vitamin D may not achieve optimal levels of 25OHD in all individuals. In order to confirm the adequacy of treatment a repeat testing should be performed to assess 25OHD levels between 8-12 weeks of supplementation to confirm that the target 25OHD level has been reached. It is important to acquaint physicians in Pakistan that repletion dose of vitamin D may vary among individuals based on their initial levels, body mass index and effective sunlight exposure. The

required dose to acquire 75 nmol/l can be estimated from measured levels; as each 100 IU of vitamin D increases the 25OHD levels to 1.0 ng/ml. It is equally important to emphasize on life style measures like safe exposure to sunlight and diet and supplements to acquire the recommended daily allowance of 800-1000 IU for older age groups. It is important to understand that over-the-counter active metabolites are not a substitute for adequate vitamin D intake and should not be used to treat vitamin D deficiency. Long-term follow-up to assess the relationship between VDD and iPTH and potential to develop hypercalciuria with excess use of VD is needed in our population.

## CONCLUSION

Single mega-dose of cholecalciferol achieve optimal levels of 25OHD in 35% of subjects after 8 weeks of supplementation.

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