Diagnostic accuracy of anti-endomysial antibody in celiac disease

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Celiac disease (CD) is precipitated by consuming food which contains gluten in genetically susceptible individuals. Its diagnosis still remains challenging. Its prevalence varies from 2 to 13%. The combination of environmental, genetic factors, and immunological mechanisms is involved in activation and progression of celiac disease. Serological tests for diagnosing CD include antigliadin antibody (AGA), anti-tissue transglutaminase (anti-tTG) antibody, and anti-endomysial antibody (anti-EMA). However, in children less than 2 years of age the performance of AGA is far better than anti-EMA and anti-tTG antibodies. Anti-EMA and anti-tTG are considered as the serological tests of choice these days in adults as they are more sensitive. Tissue biopsy is regarded as gold standard of diagnosing CD.

In Pakistan, scanty data is available on celiac disease and its criteria for diagnosis. This study was aimed to determine the diagnostic accuracy of anti-EMA antibody test in comparison to histopathological findings graded according to Modified Marsh classification in patients suspected of celiac disease.

It was a cross-sectional study carried out from March to October 2014 in the Department of Gastroenterology, Fatima Memorial Hospital, Shadman, Lahore, Pakistan. The sample included 121 patients of either gender, ages ranging from 5 to 60 years coming to the outpatient department and clinically suspected of celiac disease. Extremes of ages, having any other comorbid conditions etc. and previously diagnosed celiac patients, were excluded from the study. Formal consent from each patient or the guardian, in case of children, was taken before inclusion into the study. The whole study was performed according to Ethical Principles for Medical Research outlined in the Helsinki Declaration (revised in 2000). The study was approved by the Ethical Review Board of Khyber Medical University, Peshawar and Fatima Memorial Hospital, College of Medicine and Dentistry, Lahore.

Small bowel biopsies and blood samples were taken from these patients at the endoscopic unit of Department of Gastroenterology. Histopathological examination was done according to the Modified Marsh classification. The overall sensitivity of anti-EMA came out to be 85.7% which varied with the histological lesions being 75.0%, 83.3%, and 100% for Marsh IIIA, IIIB and IIIC, respectively. Although anti-EMA has high sensitivity but serological tests as a sole mean of diagnosis are currently unable to replace the biopsy.

The mean age of patients was 30.24 ± 9.00 years. Eighty-seven (71.9%) patients were females and 34 (28.1%) were males. No patient was found to have IgA deficiency. The frequency of CD in this study was 11.6% (14/121) on histopathology. The total patients positive for anti-EMA test (true positives 12, false positive 1) and 108 patients were negative for anti-EMA (specificity)

Sample size was calculated as 121 patients, using WHO formula, with a prevalence rate of 13%, margin of error 6% and a confidence interval of 95%. Study variables were the age, gender, serology and histopathology for celiac disease. Mean ± standard deviation for the age of patients, frequency and percentage were calculated. Sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive values (PPV) and negative predictive values (NPV) were determined by taking histopathology as gold standard. Data was analyzed by using SPSS software version 16.

As compared to the other studies, the sensitivity of anti-EMA test for total villous atrophy (VA) in this study was 75.0% (Marsh IIIA) to 80% (Marsh IIIB), which is considerably higher than the disappointing 31% (Marsh IIIA) as documented by them. A similar study by Tarmure et al. concluded that anti-EMA had a lower sensitivity in patients with Marsh-I and Marsh II lesions.

This is the first study conducted in Pakistan which determined the accuracy of anti-EMA test against histopathology in diagnosing CD. Studies done previously were mostly on clinical presentation of celiac disease and diagnosis through anti-tTG. In Pakistan, even large established laboratories in cosmopolitan cities such as Lahore and Karachi are not providing the facilities of highly specific and sensitive IgA-EMA testing. Taking the diagnostic accuracy in consideration, it is highly recommended that it should be used along with anti-tTG antibody test.

It is concluded that the serological test as a sole mean of diagnosis is currently unable to replace the intestinal biopsy as its sensitivity varies with the grading of histological lesions. Therefore, when the symptoms of celiac disease persist and patient is reported seronegative for the antibody, still an intestinal biopsy is necessary to avoid missing the disease.

**REFERENCES**