Topical Chloramphenicol/ Gentamicin in the Empirical Treatment of Acute Conjunctivitis – Is It Rational?

Sir,

Acute conjunctivitis is the most common eye infection encountered in clinical practice. The use of topical chloramphenicol/gentamicin in the empirical treatment of this condition is widely practised. The use of chloramphenical in conjunctivitis cases has been recommended[1]. There is no published data on the types of bacteria causing acute conjunctivitis in Malaysia. The results of studies done elsewhere may not reflect the true situation here. Therefore we investigated the validity of this practice in the context of our hospital situation. We believe the results of our study which we report here will be useful to general practitioners in the correct choice of antimicrobials for the effective management of acute conjunctivitis.

A total of 527 patients with acute conjunctivitis (302 males and 225 females), aged one day to 80 years, was studied for bacterial pathogens. Of the 527 cases, 218 had ophthalmia neonatorum and 309 had acute conjunctivitis. Culture was positive in 306 (58%) cases. The gram positive organisms [*Staphlococcus aureus* (26.6%) followed by *Staphlococcus epidermidis* (10.6%)] were the predominant isolates in ophthalmia neonatorum as well as in acute conjunctivitis. However, among the gram negative isolates *Pseudomonas aeruginosa* (7.4%) was predominant in cases of acute conjunctivitis while *Haemophilus influenzae* (6.1%) was the principal organism in cases of ophthalmia neonatorum.

In-vitro antibiotic sensitivity test results showed that chloramphenicol was effective against the majority of gram positive isolates and some of the gram negative bacteria, the exception being *P. aeruginosa.* Gentamicin was effective against most of the gram negative bacteria, especially *P. aeruginosa* but not against gram positive isolates. The antibiogram of the bacterial isolates in our study revealed that the overall sensitivity of all bacterial isolates was highest to chloramphenicol (94.7%), followed by gentamicin (89.8%). These results support the rationale of using topical chloramphenicol/gentamicin in the empirical treatment of acute conjunctivitis in situations where microbiological diagnostic facilities are not available, or in the institutions pending the receipts of laboratory reports.

Hence, we conclude that the use of topical chloramphenicol/gentamicin in the empirical treatment of acute conjunctivitis in our local situation is justified, although this practice was based on the experience of studies done elsewhere[2,3].

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The Effectiveness of Permethrin-impregnated Bed Nets for Malaria Control in Kg. Ganoh, an Orang Asli Area of Rompin District, Pahang

Sir,

Malaria is by far the most important insect-borne disease with 100 million persons being infected each year throughout the world as reported by the World Health Organisation[1]. In Malaysia, malaria is still a major public health problem especially among the