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Brain Cytokines and Neuropsychiatric Disorders

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Many neuropsychiatric diseases still elude full understanding and effective therapy. It has become increasingly obvious that some of the prevailing explanations of their pathology are overly simplistic since only a small fraction of patients appear to be successfully helped, at best. One possibility is that the role of lymphocytes and neuroimmune interactions in the central nervous system (CNS) have been largely neglected,¹ except in clear cases that are autoimmune in nature, as in multiple sclerosis (MS).² Much can be learned from rare diseases about apparent links between the immune and the nervous system. For example, systemic mastocytosis is characterized by mast cell proliferation and activation in most organs, including the CNS.³ The prevalence of psychiatric problems in these patients is much higher than the general population, and acute stress is known to exacerbate their symptoms.³

The main family of immune system molecules implicated in neurologic diseases are cytokines, which may be secreted under stress^{4,5} and affect cerebral neurotransmission.⁶ Cytokines are modulatory molecules that control the development and differentiation of all bone marrow-derived pluripotent stem cells. Cytokines also have inflammatory and regulatory actions.⁷⁻⁹ Acute stress induces leukocyte trafficking and augments immune responses.¹⁰ In fact, acute stress can increase mast cell-dependent serum interleukin-6 (IL-6)^{11,12} that involves selective release without degranulation.¹³ Elevated serum IL-6 is characteristic in systemic mastocytosis patients¹⁴ in whom stress can precipitate seizures.¹⁵ IL-6 overproduction is also involved in anticonvulsant hypersensitivity.¹⁶

THE HYPOTHALAMIC-PITUITARY-ADRENAL (HPA)

Cytokines and chemokines have been implicated in inflammation of the CNS.^{6,17,18} and in neuropsychiatric conditions.^{19,20} Cytokines are expressed in the brain and are involved in regulating the HPA axis.²¹ Stressors activate the HPA axis, resulting in elevated plasma levels of cortisol in humans and modulation of proinflammatory cytokine responses. However, acute stress could induce neurogenic inflammation in a variety of organs,⁵ including the brain.² Stress leads to an increased expression of proinflammatory cytokines such as IL-1 and IL-6,^{6,22} which play a critical role in the regulation of the HPA axis.²¹ In particular, IL-1 and IL-6 induce up-regulation of corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH) which regulates the HPA axis.²³ CRH and related peptides can also activate brain mast cells²⁴ through a number of CRH

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TABLE 1. Publications Discussing the Role of the Immune System in the CNS

Immune System	Nervous System	Reference
Mast cells	Inflammatory diseases, acute stress	Theoharides and Cochrane ²
Mast cell degranulation	Opioid withdrawal	Taiwo et al ³²
Cytokines	Neuroinflammation and Alzheimer disease	Cacquevel et al ⁶⁹
IL-6	Dementia	Wada-Isoe et al ⁶⁸
IL-6 receptor	Neurologic diseases	Michalopoulou et al ⁴⁹
Mast cells	Tumor growth	Theoharides and Conti ⁸⁰
IL-10	Multiple sclerosis	Adikari et al ⁴⁷ ; Jung et al ⁴⁸
Cytokines	Multiple sclerosis	Flachenecker et al ⁵¹ ; Calabresi et al ⁵⁰
IL-6 and IL-10	Alzheimer disease	Arosio et al ⁶⁶ ; Quintanilla et al ⁷⁰ ; Zhang et al ⁶⁷
Blood lymphocytes	Depression, Alzheimer's disease, schizophrenia, stress	Gladkevich et al ^{1*}
Cytokines	Hypothalamic-pituitary network	Kariagina et al ²¹
IL-1 polymorphisms	Dysthymia	Fertuzinhos et al ⁵⁷
IFN-gamma, IL-4, TNF-alpha	Roles the CNS	Shapshak et al ³⁶
Cytokines	Stress and depression	O'Brien et al ⁵⁹ ; Anisman and Merali ¹⁹ ; Steptoe et al ⁵
Proinflammatory cytokines	Migraines, phobias	Covelli et al ^{64*}
IL-10	Inflammation	Conti et al ⁴⁴
IFN-alpha treatments	Depression and neuropsychiatric side effects	Van Gool et al ^{37*} ; Schaefer et al ^{38*} ; Malaguarnera et al ³⁹
Cytokines and kinins	Neuropsychiatric lupus	Dellalibera-Joviliano et al ⁷³
IL-6	Meningitis, vascular permeability	Paul et al ³⁴
Mast Cells	Blood-brain barrier	Peroutka and Allen ⁸⁹
Autoantibodies, Proinflammatory cytokines	Neuropsychiatric systemic lupus erythematosus	Hermosillo-Romo and Brey ⁷²
Cytokines and kinins	Nervous system signaling	Kronfol and Remick ^{20*}
IL-1 and IL-6	Cachexia-anorexia syndrome	Plata-Salaman et al ^{42*}
Chemokines	Nervous system inflammation	Huang et al ¹¹ ; Mennicken et al ¹⁷
Cytokines	Cerebral neurotransmission	Dunn et al ⁶
IL-10	Cerebrovascular disease	Pelidou et al ⁴⁶
Chemokines	Depression, neuroprotection and neurotoxicity	Licinio and Wong ⁵⁶
Cytokines	Panic disorder	Weizman et al ⁶¹
Cytokines	Blood-brain barrier permeability	de Boe and Breimer ²⁷
IL-1	Panic disorder	Brambilla et al ⁶⁰

*Denotes review article.

receptor isoforms²⁵ leading to disruption of the blood-brain barrier.^{26,27} Mast cells are a rich source of cytokines as well as CRH and related peptides.²⁸ Mast cells could accumulate in response to the specific chemoattractant RANTES,²⁹ which is secreted in inflammatory sites.^{30,31} Brain mast cells were recently shown to redistribute and become activated in the mouse thalamus during naloxone-induced withdrawal.³²

NEUROLOGIC DISORDERS

Cytokines could promote neurodegeneration or neuroprotection in different animal models. Injection of lipopolysaccharide to induces changes in brain cytokine mRNA and protein levels of such cytokines as IL-1- β , IL-6, and

TNF- β .³³ Moreover, IL-6 appears to be involved with increased vascular permeability in bacterial meningitis.³⁴ The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) invades the CNS inside immune cells and leads to behavioral problems that include depression and psychosis.³⁵ Elevated expression of interferon (IFN)- γ and decreased IL-4 are correlated with greater toxicity in HIV-1-infected brains.³⁶ It is interesting that there is increased incidence of depression in AIDS patients, over and beyond what may be expected due to the disease, and a causal relationship has been reported between brain IFN- α levels and the development of depressive symptoms.^{37,38} In addition to altering the brain cytokine profile,³⁹ IFN- α may be modulating the serotonin, dopamine,

and glutamate systems.⁴⁰ Interestingly, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs appear to counteract IFN-induced depression, potentially through inhibition of both cytokine and stress hormone release.⁴¹ Cytokines may also be involved in the cachexia-anorexia syndrome by affecting specific brain regions.⁴² The anti-inflammatory cytokine IL-10^{43,44} has recently been shown to promote survival of neurons and block lipopolysaccharide-induced brain IL-1 signaling.⁴⁵ Increased numbers of IL-10 secreting cells were reported in the blood of patients with cerebrovascular diseases.⁴⁶ IL-10 also regulates the proinflammatory environment in MS⁴⁷; this survival-promoting activity is due to IL-10 signaling through the Stat-3 pathway, which inhibits cell death. Moreover, the drug glatiramer acetate used in MS induces IL-10 production.⁴⁸ Activated microglia produce high levels of IL-1 β and IL-1 α , as well as IL-6, the soluble receptor of which was increased in the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) of MS patients.⁴⁹ In fact, a number of cytokines have been found to be increased in the CSF of MS patients.^{50,51} Moreover, the mast cell unique protease tryptase was also elevated in the CSF of MS patients,⁵² and tryptase is known to cause widespread inflammation by stimulating protease-activated receptors.⁵³ In this context, it is significant that gene array analysis of affected brains from deceased MS patients showed up-regulation only of mast cell-related markers.⁵⁴

PSYCHIATRIC DISORDERS

Several studies have reported associations between psychologic stress, cytokines, and psychiatric illness.^{19,55–57} For instance, cytokines have specifically been implicated in depression.^{6,55,56,58,59} Increased cytokine production has also been reported in plasma,⁶⁰ and cytokines are secreted from peripheral mononuclear cells of panic disorder patients.⁶¹ In fact, panic disorder was linked to the same chromosome as interstitial cystitis,⁶² an inflammatory condition of the urinary bladder characterized by increased cytokine production.⁶³ Patients with phobias and migraines have also been characterized by increased release of proinflammatory cytokines.⁶⁴ IL-1 β gene polymorphisms have been reported to increase the risk of psychosis, especially schizophrenia.⁶⁵

Cytokines appear to be involved in Alzheimer disease, as IL-6 gene polymorphism has been demonstrated in this disease^{66,67}; IL-6 is elevated in the CSF of such patients.^{68,69} Moreover, IL-6 induces phosphorylation of the tau protein that is considered important in Alzheimer pathology.⁷⁰ Alzheimer patients treated with an acetylcholinesterase inhibitor had higher IL-4 and lower IL-1 β expression from peripheral blood mononuclear cells.⁷¹

Of those with systemic lupus erythematosus, 75% have neuropsychiatric systemic lupus erythematosus, which was found to be associated with increased CSF levels of kinins and cytokines.^{72,73} Vascular endothelial growth factor is up-

regulated after various injuries to the brain⁷⁴ and is also released by mast cells.⁷⁵ Vascular endothelial growth factor is neurotrophic and neuroprotective and plays seminal pleiotropic roles in CNS development and repair. It was recently shown that CRH can stimulate selective secretion of vascular endothelial growth factor from human cultured mast cells.²⁴ Stress can inhibit mitogen-activated protein kinase signaling,⁷⁶ a pivotal component in cytokine- and stress-induced apoptosis.⁷⁷ It also regulates cell differentiation and survival through p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase activation.⁷⁸ In some pathologic conditions of the brain, p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase transduces stress-related signals, increases expression of proinflammatory cytokines, and induces cellular damage or apoptosis.⁷⁹ Moreover, p38 mitogen-activated protein kinase modulates STAT1 phosphorylation in IFN- γ signaling in brain astrocytes.

Stress may increase/permit brain tumor metastases through mast cell activation,⁸⁰ supporting the use of anxiolytic and antidepressant medications in such patients.⁸¹ Reduction of cytotoxic immune activity and a shift in T_H1/T_H2 balance of the immune response toward T_H2-dominant immunity may help explain these findings.⁸² For instance, IL-18 is a potent proinflammatory cytokine that enhances innate immunity by activating both T_H1 and T_H2 responses depending on the cytokine microenvironment.⁸³

A number of dietary supplements have recently emerged as potentially effective for allergies, asthma, and also in a variety of CNS conditions discussed above, such as anxiety, depression, and migraines.⁸⁴ It is noteworthy that many of these molecules appear to affect mast cell activation.⁸⁴ Mast cell inhibitors especially select natural flavonoids can block release of IL-6, IL-8 and TNF- α ,^{85,86} as well as experimental allergic encephalomyelitis.⁸⁷ These flavonoids appear to be particularly potent mast cell blockers and anti-inflammatory agents⁸⁸; they could therefore potentially be useful in some of the conditions discussed above.

Table 1 lists publications that discuss the role of the immune system in the CNS.

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