QUINIDINE-DIGOXIN INTERACTION: CARDIAC EFFICACY OF ELEVATED SERUM DIGOXIN CONCENTRATION

GUSTAV G. BELZ, M.D.,
WITTICH DOERING, M.D.,
PETER E. AUST, M.D.,
MANFRED HEINZ, M.D.,
JENNIFER MATTHEWS, M.Sci.
and
BERTHOLD SCHNEIDER, Ph.D.
Wiesbaden, München
and
Hannover, West Germany
Institut für Kardiovaskuläre Therapie, Wiesbaden,
Krankenhaus München-Schwabing, II. Medizinische
Abteilung, München, and Abteilung Biometrie,
Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Hannover

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Quinidine-digoxin interaction: Cardiac efficacy of elevated serum digoxin concentration

Cardioactivity due to elevated serum digoxin concentration (SDC) after quinidine (Q) and digoxin (D) was evaluated in six healthy subjects by means of measurement of systolic time intervals (STIs). Each subject randomly received basic treatments with 0.2 mg D and placebo (PL1). Randomized coadministrations with Q (1 gmlday), sparteine (SP) (0.8 gmlday), and placebo (PL2) were given for 7-day periods. A steady-state dose of 0.4 mg D was added. Mean SDC increased from 0.48 ng/ml during 0.2 mg D + PL2 to 1.13 ng/ml on 0.2 mg D + Q (P < 0.05); it was unchanged by SP. On 0.4 mg D there were further shortening of STIs compared to those on 0.2 mg D + PL2. Q markedly prolonged STIs; the SP effects were similar but less pronounced. When given with Q or SP, the effect of D was obscured by opposing inotropic properties; consequently, despite increasing SDC, measurable STIs were unchanged. The true glycoside effect was determined by comparing the effects of the pure antiarrhythmic to those of the antiarrhythmic with D. These calculations showed that the glycoside effect of the elevated SDC during Q + D dosing was much the same as the effect of 0.4 mg D.

Gustav G. Belz, M.D., Wittich Doering, M.D., Peter E. Aust, M.D., Manfred Heinz, M.D., Jennifer Matthews, M.Sci., and Berthold Schneider, Ph.D.
Wiesbaden, München, and Hannover, West Germany
Institut für Kardiovaskuläre Therapie, Wiesbaden, Krankenhaus München-Schwabing, II. Medizinische Abteilung, München, and Abteilung Biometrie, Medizinische Hochschule Hannover, Hannover

The use of D with Q results in a rise in SDC. Conflicting results have been reported on the dynamic effect and clinical relevance of this elevation.

In two studies that measured STIs it was concluded that the elevated SDC during Q use did not reflect an increased glycoside effect on the heart. In another study we evaluated the effects of a single dose of Q during long-term D and placebo (PL). Under these conditions, when no kinetic interaction was detectable, Q and D maintained direction and intensity of their opposing cardiac effects. This resulted in an almost mathematically subtraction of their negative or positive inotropic effects. This independency of effect is a strong argument in favor of the cardioactivity of the elevated SDC after long-term Q and D. This consideration is supported by clinical reports as well as by in vitro and animal experiences. In the light of the conflicting reports, further study seemed indicated.
Abbreviations used

D: Digoxin
Q: Quinidine
SP: Sparteine
PL₁: Basic placebo treatment
PL₂: Coadministration of placebo with basic treatment
STI: Systolic time interval
QSc: Electromechanical systole
PEP: Pre-ejection period
LVET: Left ventricular ejection time
QT: Electrical systole
-c values: Parameters corrected for heart rate for any of the above cardiac parameters (e.g., QTc, LVETc, PEPc)
SDC: Serum D concentration
SQC: Serum Q concentration
SSPC: Serum SP concentration
HR: Heart rate

Methods

Our subjects were six healthy men with a mean age of 26.6 yr (SD 3.9), a mean height of 180.5 cm (SD 3.9), and a mean body weight of 79.0 kg (SD 8.1). Complete physical examinations revealed no abnormalities. No drugs other than those being studied were permitted.

Design. Our design included control studies with PL and a noninteracting antiarrhythmic drug, SP. SP does not effect SDC but has dynamic properties resembling those of Q. The first part of the study was of a randomized, crossover, double-blind format and was followed by a nonrandomized study in which the glycoside maintenance dose was doubled.

Glycoside. The methylated lipophilic derivative of D (β-methyldigoxin), which has a high bioavailability and interacts with Q in the same manner as D, was used. For the crossover phase each subject received PL₁ and a daily maintenance dose of 0.2 mg D for a period of 28 days each; the sequence of these basic treatments was randomized. For loading, 0.4 mg D or an equivalent number of PL₁ tablets were given on the initial 2 days of the basic treatment period. Thereafter, from days 3 to 28, PL₁ or 0.2 mg D were given at 8:00 p.m. The two basic treatment periods were separated by a 3-wk washout phase.

At the end of the two crossover phases a final posttreatment phase was included. The subjects completing the PL₁ phase as the last basic treatment received 0.4 mg D as a loading dose for 2 days, followed by 0.2 mg D daily for 5 days. The subjects who received 0.2 mg D in the second basic treatment phase continued on this dosage for 7 more days, after which the final phase began with all subjects receiving 0.4 mg D at 8:00 p.m. for a week.

Antiarrhythmics. After the first week of either PL₁ or D pretreatment, subjects received, in a randomized double-blind fashion, each of the following drugs for 7-day coadministration periods: 500 mg b.i.d. Q bisulfate, slow time release; 400 mg b.i.d. SP sulfate, slow time release; and PL₂ tablets, b.i.d. The drugs were taken at 8:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m.; compliance was monitored daily.

Protocol. From 6:00 p.m. the previous night until all data were recorded for each study day no strenuous exercise, caffeine containing drinks, alcohol, or nicotine were permitted. On the study day fasting subjects reported to the laboratory at between 7:30 and 8:45 a.m. All tracings were done at the end of each treatment phase 12 hr after the last drug doses. After a resting period of 15 min, recordings were made with the subject in a supine position and his head at a 15 degree angle. Immediately after the measurements were taken, 50 ml venous blood was drawn and the serum was frozen at −20°.

Recordings. All measurements and recordings were in duplicate and the mean of the two values was used for calculations. ECG lead CM₅₂, phonocardiogram m and carotid pulse tracings were recorded simultaneously. Twenty-five complexes at 10 mm/sec were recorded followed immediately by 10 complexes at 100 mm/sec while the subjects held their breath after normal expiration. Recordings were by Cardirex 3T jet recorder (Siemens Elema). Blood pressure was measured by a standard cuff mercury manometer.

Measurements and calculations. All cardiac parameters were analyzed by an independent investigator who was not aware of the drugs used. HR was obtained by measuring the last 20 R-R intervals at 10 mm/sec; mean values of the first five complexes of the 100-mm/sec tracings were used for the STIs as described.
Cardiac performance was assessed by measurement of QS2 and LVET. PR, QRS, and QT intervals were recorded by ECG. Corrections for HR of STIs were according to the method of Weissler et al. The differences between the measured and the predicted STIs are Δc values. QTc was calculated by Bazett’s formula. Brachial artery mean pressure was calculated by Wezler’s and Böger’s equation.

Two types of comparisons of the effects were made. For the first, the values at the end of the 1 wk with PL1 pretreatment were used as baseline. The difference between the values obtained during this baseline and the various treatments were calculated individually and are expressed as ΔI (Fig. 1). The individual differences in the STIs between the basic treatments of 0.2 mg D and PL1 for respective coadministration periods (e.g., 0.2 D + Q vs PL1 + Q) are indicated as ΔII values and reveal the true glycoside effect in the presence of the other drugs. Mean ΔII values are shown in Fig. 2.

Serum concentration measurements. A highly specific $^{125}$I digoxin radioimmunoassay (Diagnostic Prod., Los Angeles) was used for SDC determination. Interference of the test by either Q or SP was excluded. The gas chromatography of SP serum concentrations were determined according to the method of Dengler et al. Q serum concentrations were measured by high-pressure liquid chromatography.

Statistics. The influences of treatment with PL1 or D, coadministration of Q, SP, or PL2, and posttreatment with 0.4 mg D on all parameters were analyzed by paired comparisons (paired t tests with Scheffe’s correction for multiple comparisons) between measurements after the combined treatment periods and after pretreatment. It was assumed that order of crossover did not influence these comparisons.

Results

Mean values of the physiologic parameters and drug concentrations are detailed in Table I. This table presents the crude mean values, whereas the Figs. 1 and 2 present the mean ΔI and ΔII values.

SDC during the various combined-drug dosing periods with 0.2 mg D basic treatment and during posttreatment with 0.4 mg D are shown in Fig. 3. During Q treatment mean SDC rose by 135%; SP did not change the SDC. After the 0.4-mg D dose, mean SDC was higher than during Q + D. Mean SDC values after 0.2 mg D + Q and 0.4 mg D treatments are two and three times the 0.2 mg D + PL2 treatment values (P < 0.05). Mean SQC and SSPCs were nearly identical during both PL1 and D treatment phases and were in the lower therapeutic

Fig. 1. Mean (±SEM, n = 6) ΔI values. All tracings were done 12 hr after the last drug dose. *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01.
Fig. 3. Steady-state SDCs 12 hr after last dose. Values are mean ± SEM (n = 6). P < 0.05 compared to 0.2 D + PL2.

Fig. 2. Mean (±SEM, n = 6) ΔII values during the various treatment phases. *P < 0.05; **P < 0.01.

Effects on STI and QTc
Digitalis effects. Glycoside resulted in the expected dose-dependent shortening of QS₂c, LVETc, and QTc. In comparison with baseline, 0.2 D + PL₂ induced shortening of QS₂c (−19 msec, P < 0.01), LVETc (−9 msec, P < 0.05), and QTc (−24 msec, P < 0.05). On 0.4 mg D glycoside effects were −26 msec for QS₂c (P < 0.01), −13 msec for LVETc (P < 0.05), and −31 msec for QTc (P < 0.05).

Effects of the antiarrhythmics. In contrast to digitalis, the antiarrhythmics induced lengthening of QS₂c, LVETc, and QTc. PL₁ + Q resulted in prolongation of QS₂c (+9 msec, P < 0.05) and QTc (+54 msec, P < 0.01), while LVETc was only moderately affected (+7 msec, P > 0.05). PL₁ + SP resulted in a less pronounced prolongation of STI than did Q. After SP, QTc changed substantially (+8 msec, P < 0.05).

Effects of combined treatment. Treatment with 0.2 D + Q resulted in QS₂c and LVETc values similar to those after 0.2 D + PL₂. These values, which are almost equal despite the more than doubled SDC, result from the counteracting dynamic effects of digitalis and Q on STI. QTc is prolonged after PL₁ + Q, but there is only moderate lengthening with 0.2
Table I. Physiologic response to various treatments (mean ± SD; n = 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parameter</th>
<th>1-wk pre-treatment PL</th>
<th>1 gm Q</th>
<th>0.8 gm SP</th>
<th>1-wk pre-treatment PL</th>
<th>1.0 gm Q</th>
<th>0.8 gm SP</th>
<th>Posttreatment (0.4 mg D)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SDC (ng/ml)</td>
<td>0.69 ± 0.48</td>
<td>1.13 ± 0.53</td>
<td>1.64 ± 0.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SQC (μg/ml)</td>
<td>1.81 ± 0.28</td>
<td>2.04 ± 0.30</td>
<td>2.16 ± 0.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>SSPC (μg/ml)</td>
<td>0.29 ± 0.28</td>
<td>0.35 ± 0.30</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>HR (min⁻¹)</td>
<td>60 ± 4</td>
<td>63 ± 5</td>
<td>64 ± 6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>BAPm (mm Hg)</td>
<td>90 ± 5</td>
<td>93 ± 6</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PR interval (msec)</td>
<td>165 ± 23</td>
<td>167 ± 25</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QRS duration (msec)</td>
<td>92 ± 4</td>
<td>94 ± 6</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QTc (msec)</td>
<td>389 ± 21</td>
<td>389 ± 22</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>QSc (msec)</td>
<td>-5 ± 16</td>
<td>-21 ± 12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LVETc (msec)</td>
<td>-1 ± 11</td>
<td>-10 ± 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Although Gold et al. observed increased susceptibility to cardiac glycosides in dogs pretreated with D in 1932, the kinetic interaction between Q and D was not generally recognized before 1978. Reduction of D clearance and of distribution volume are responsible for this interaction.7, 16

We observed dynamic and kinetic drug interactions. Using the STIs for assessment of effects we noted a shortening after D, whereas Q and SP induced prolongation; these effects have been documented. Concomitant Q increased SDC, whereas SP did not exert this kind of kinetic interaction. Paralleling the SDC increase after 0.2 D + Q, the true D effects, i.e., the effects after elimination of the Q-induced shift of the original base of D ef-
Table II. ΔAll values (mean ± SEM) during various treatments (n = 6)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treatment phase</th>
<th>QS2C (msec)</th>
<th>LVETc (msec)</th>
<th>QTc (msec)</th>
<th>SDC (ng/ml)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Δ II after 0.2 D + PI</td>
<td>-21.9 ± 4.7</td>
<td>-10.3 ± 3.5</td>
<td>-26.3 ± 6.5</td>
<td>0.48 ± 0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ II after 0.2 D + SP</td>
<td>-24.0 ± 4.7</td>
<td>-8.2 ± 3.3</td>
<td>-27.5 ± 8.0</td>
<td>0.53 ± 0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ II after 0.2 D + Q</td>
<td>-29.3 ± 2.5</td>
<td>-14.4 ± 3.6</td>
<td>-32.6 ± 3.8</td>
<td>1.13 ± 0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ I after 0.4 D*</td>
<td>-26.2 ± 4.6</td>
<td>-13.1 ± 3.3</td>
<td>-30.8 ± 8.7</td>
<td>1.64 ± 0.34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Presented for comparison.

Effects, also rose (Fig. 2). These increased effects of 0.2 mg D after Q were especially evident when compared with those of D + SP, which did not influence SDC. The true glycoside effects during 0.2 D + Q were in the same range as those during 0.4 mg D. Considering the increase of D effects induced by increasing DSD to higher D doses or to drug interaction, the slope of the dose effect curve must be taken into account; for QS2C, a ceiling effect is reached at -25 msec and for LVETc, at -12.5 msec. Since the observed values approach this ceiling (Fig. 1), it is evident that there is only a moderate increase in glycoside effect from the distinctly higher SDC after 0.4 mg of D or the combination of 0.2 D + Q. The increased D effects during D + Q dosing give strong support to the assumption that the elevated SDC after Q is cardiac effective.

Differences in design may, in part, account for the difference between our results and those reported in the literature. Hirsh et al. measured the effect of Q alone in fewer than half of the subjects who began the experiment. Steiness et al. added a single dose of D to a basic treatment with quinidine. As recently demonstrated by Williams and Mathew, the sequence of drug application in this drug interaction may be of crucial importance.

Our data were obtained from studies in healthy subjects and should be cautiously applied to the clinical situation. It has been established, however, that STIs in patients with cardiac disease are affected in a similar way by cardiac glycosides as those in healthy subjects. Almost all antiarrhythmics have negative inotropic properties that diminish the inotropic glycoside effects. This is not the case in long-term use of Q and D since, as we have shown, the simultaneously increasing SDC overrides the negative Q effect. From the viewpoint of cardiac performance this would not indicate a need for reduction of D dose when Q is also given. These considerations are only valid for those aspects of cardiac function influenced in opposing directions by Q and D, however. In areas of cardiac function in which Q and D do not counteract each other, augmentation of the glycoside effect, corresponding to increasing SDC, has to be expected. This argument is supported by the observation of patients with marked prolongation of atrioventricular nodal conduction during Q + D dosing. Thus, since most cases of documented Q syncope were precipitated by premature ventricular beats, concern that elevated SDC during combined drug therapy may induce arrhythmias, which may in turn facilitate the onset of syncope, may be justified. Careful monitoring (by determination of SDC and appropriate adjustment of D dose) of patients receiving both drugs is recommended.

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