Correspondences

Leptospirosis : Need for Diagnostic Criteria

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Sir,

I read the article “Mildly Elevated Transaminases: Excellent diagnostic clue for Anicteric Leptospirosis” with interest.¹ Leptospirosis can be diagnosed only by laboratory tests as clinical features are non-specific. But the laboratory tests are complex and hence definite guidelines for diagnosis of human leptospirosis is necessary. I fully agree that microscopic agglutination test (MAT) and PCR can be done only in specialised laboratories. IgM Elisa / macroscopic slide agglutination test (MSAT) are simple and sensitive tests which are adequate for diagnosis of leptospirosis and can be done in small institutions. The modified Faine’s criteria utilising IgM Elisa / MSAT can be used as the guidelines for diagnosis of leptospirosis in Indian institutions, as MAT is not easily available.²

Raised liver enzyme (SGOT and SGPT) can occur in anicteric leptospirosis. But, it also can occur in many febrile diseases such as malaria, typhoid, scrub typhus, dengue and viral hepatitis. It is essential that kits to diagnose these febrile diseases are also available, as co-infections can also occur (for example malaria + leptospirosis) with similar clinical features. In fact, mild elevation of SGOT and SGPT with disproportionate elevation of serum bilirubin due to cholestasis is considered the hallmark of leptospiral hepatitis. It is essential that data on elevated SGOT and SGPT from other infectious diseases are analysed before this can be considered specific for leptospirosis.

I fully agree that empiric therapy for leptospirosis can be started early, as the diagnostic tests become positive after one week. It is also essential that the diagnosis of leptospirosis is confirmed before the patient is discharged on recovery. Clinicians should also insist that the Microbiology Department in their institutions have kits available for diagnosis of common tropical infectious diseases and every febrile patient should be investigated in detail for the cause of fever.

Leptospirosis is a disease which predominantly affects lower socio-economic groups who probably cannot afford the cost of diagnosis. At the leptospiral laboratory, Madras Medical College and Government General Hospital, Chennai, the diagnostic tests for leptospirosis are done free of cost for patients admitted in Government Hospitals. In this centre, the MSAT is utilised as the screening test for diagnosis of Leptospirosis and during the year 2006, 2765 patients were diagnosed to have leptospirosis from samples received from various public sector hospitals in Chennai.³ It would be ideal for premier government institutions in every State to provide these facilities for diagnosis of leptospirosis.

References