

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

New steroids

Dear Editor:

I want to comment on Noel Williams' short article, 'New steroids' (*Can J Gastroenterol* 1993;7:588), concerning the use of rapidly metabolized glucocorticoids in Crohn's disease.

Clinical trials so far have not addressed the group of patients that we are most concerned about. Let me explain.

Most of us are reasonably happy with the acute therapy for Crohn's disease using prednisone. We are not expecting a drug that will be much more effective, or less toxic over the short term.

Our concern is with the intermediate and long term side effects of steroids in patients requiring prednisone (for more than say, three months). We are particularly concerned about steroid osteonecrosis, although diabetes, cataracts, glaucoma, etc, are fairly common problems. Budesonide could possibly suppress chronic disease activity just as effectively as 6-mercaptopurine, azathioprine or even methotrexate. If that turned out to be so, we would be relieved both of our fears concerning long term steroid use and our fears concerning long term immunosuppressive use.

Whether budesonide will significantly alter the well being of the population of Crohn's disease patients with chronic active disease is unclear. To do a controlled trial in such patients would be very difficult to coordinate because patient and doctor interest would be difficult to sustain. It will probably never be done unless a single clinic takes on the responsibility.

I think gastroenterologists are hoping that budesonide will save us from fear concerning lawsuits arising out of steroid osteonecrosis, neoplasia or pregnancy failure from immunosuppressive drugs. Dr Williams' conclusion seems to reflect *this* hope more than the weight of evidence provided so far by clinical trials.

We are still waiting for the 'saviour to come'.

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WESTERN EDITOR NOTES: *Dr Jan Irvine reported data at the British Society of Gastroenterology clearly indicating that budesonide does improve the quality of life index in patients with Crohn's disease.*



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