



4700 West Lake Avenue
Glenview, IL 60025 - 1485
847-375-4731 Phone
info@painmed.org

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www.painmed.org

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Contact Information
Susan M. Thompson
Director, Communications
American Academy of Pain Medicine
847-375-3686 office
sthompson@painmed.org

A Small Study of Patients Suffering with Intractable Pain Benefit from Hormone Therapy Using Human Chorionic Gonadotropin

March 24, 2011, National Harbor, MD—Results from a small study of intractable pain patients being treated with the human chorionic gonadotropin (HCG) hormone reported that they had experienced pain free hours in the past month. These results were presented today at a poster session at the American Academy of Pain Medicine's 27th Annual Meeting.

Forest Tennant MD PhD, of the Veract Intractable Pain Clinic in West Covina, California, presented the results. The study included 12 patients suffering from intractable pain, which is a term that has come out of the legislative and legal system and refers to a group of patients that are the most serious of pain patients. These patients have severe and constant pain, 24-hours a day, which causes many to be bed bound and house bound. "We think intractability has something to do with neuroplasticity of the brain, which imbeds the memory of the pain in the brain, similar to a phantom limb pain. These people are truly debilitated and miserable and to date the only thing they've been able to do is take care of it symptomatically and there's been no hope in sight, we just try to keep them comfortable, it's really palliative care," Dr. Tennant comments.

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Patients in the study described their pain as severe and constant and that it interfered with sleep and eating patterns. All the patients required a long-acting opioid for pain suppression and a short-acting opioid for breakthrough pain. All patients gave informed consent via a protocol approved by an Institutional Review Board to receive this HCG compound and be part of the study.

HCG is made in the pituitary gland in conjunction with growth hormone and is often used for weight loss, although controversial. Dr. Tennant received a call from a weight control clinic, reporting that some of their patients with arthritis and fibromyalgia were getting better while receiving HCG. Dr. Tennant has been working with hormone therapy for decades trying to help the intractable pain patient and began this small study using HCG.

This hormone is comprised of two amino acid sub-units, which provide a theoretical basis for use in pain treatment. One unit contains follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), luteinizing hormone (LH), and thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH). The other unit is an androgenic compound that increases cyclic adenosine monophosphate (cAMP) and nitric oxide (NO). The initial HCG was given in challenge dosages of 500 to 1,000 units to 12 intractable pain patients to determine possible side effects and a potentially effective dosage regimen.

Within one week, 8 of the 12 felt positive effects from their challenge dosage and continued HCG for over one year in a dosage of 1,000 to 3,000 units a week, reporting increased energy, improved mental concentration and memory, less depression and fewer pain flares. Six of the eight reported a pain free hour. "Zero pain is the endpoint we have in pain treatment. I have been working with intractable pain patients since 1975 and for this to occur in this group of patients in quite a shock," Dr. Tennant said. There were also no side effects from the treatment reported. Seven of the eight (87.5%) significantly reduced their opioid usage by 30 to 50 percent.

The symptom improvement observed in these patients calls for advanced clinical trials and suggest that HCG may correct some of the adverse neuroplasticity associated with severe intractable pain. “To have people actually say they have some hours in the week that they don’t feel pain is very significant. This hormonal treatment has some curative effects and may be able to reverse some of the brain and nerve damage that is being done,” Dr. Tennant concludes.

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The American Academy of Pain Medicine is the premiere medical association for pain physicians and their treatment teams with over 2,600 members. Now in its 27th year of service, the Academy’s mission is to optimize the health of patients in pain and eliminate it as a major public health problem by advancing the practice and the specialty of pain medicine through education, training, advocacy and research. Information is available on the practice of pain medicine at www.painmed.org.

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