CONTENTS

Section 1 — Laboratory and Clinical Immunology and Inflammation
Co-chairmen: J.-P. BUREAU (Nimes, France)  
E. HAEN (Munich, W. Germany)  
F. LEVI (Paris, France)

Circannual modulation of the circadian rhythm of polymorphonuclear cells
J.-P. BUREAU, G. LABRECQUE, and M. COUPÉ

Increased evening exposure to cyclosporine and metabolites

Evaluation of various factors influencing the action of mouse α, β interferon on the chemiluminescence of mouse peritoneal macrophages
V. CARRIERE, P. DORFMAN and M. BASTIDE

Two-dose chronopharmacokinetic optimization of cyclosporine in pancreas transplant patients

Chronobiological aspects of spondylarthritis
C. FOCAN, M. ALVIN, V. MAZY, D. FOCAN-HENRARD, F. LEVI and P. FRANCHIMONT

Alteration of circadian time structure of plasma proteins in patients with inflammation
C. FOCAN, B. BRUGUEROLLE, C. ARNAUD, F. LEVI, V. MAZY, D. FOCAN-HENRARD and G. BOUVENOT
### Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Circadian-stage-specified effects of melatonin on human natural killer (NK) cell activity: <em>In vitro</em> and <em>in vivo</em> studies</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. GATTI, R. CARIGNOLA, R. MASERA, M. LUISA SARTORI, A. SALVADORI, E. MAGRO and A. ANGELI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circadian-shaped intrarenal cyclosporine delivery</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of circadian changes in triglyceride concentrations on the pharmacokinetics and experimental toxicity of cyclosporine</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. R. LUKE, K. VADIEI and L. J. BRUNNER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circadian dosing-stage dependence in metabolic effects of cyclosporine in the rat</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.-F. MALMARY, K. KABBAJ and J. OUSTRIN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pain time profile under treatment with Ibuprofen in patients suffering from osteoarthritis (multicenter study)</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. MOERCHEL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronopharmacologic optimization of oral ciclosporin A (CIA) in mice: A search for a compromise between least renal toxicity and highest immunosuppressive effects</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. PATI, I. FLORENTIN, G. LEMAIGRE, M. MECHKOURI and F. LEVI</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circadian variations of the efficiency of hepatitis B vaccination</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. PÖLLMANN and B. PÖLLMANN</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seasonal variations of host resistance and <em>in vitro</em> antibody formation of spleen cells from the B6C3F1 mouse</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. RATAJCZAK, P. THOMAS, T. VOLLMUTH, D. HECK, R. SOTHERN and W. HRUSHESKY</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section 2A — Neurobiology and Endocrinology</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-chairmen: G. DARCOURT (Nice, France)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. REITER (San Antonio, Texas)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. RIETVELD (Leiden, Netherlands)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y. TOUTOU (Paris, France)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further evaluation of the treatment of jet-lag by melatonin: A double-blind crossover study</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. ARENDT and M. ALDHOUS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The phase relation of corticosterone and prolactin injections as a factor in the inhibition of hibernation in the thirteen-lined ground squirrel, *Citellus tridecemlineatus*  
J. T. BURNS and A. H. MEIER

Circadian and circannual variations of plasma calcitonin level in the rat: Influence of sex  
F. DUCHÁTEL, M.-F. MALMARY and J. OUSTRIN

The circadian pattern of plasma melatonin in anorexia nervosa: Its possible relationships with the pituitary–gonadal impairment  
E. FERRARI, P. A. BOSSOLO, S. FOPPA, S. COMIS, P. MAGNI, F. FRASCHINI and F. BRAMBILLA

The circadian rhythm of proopiomelanocortin-related peptides in aging  
E. FERRARI, P. A. BOSSOLO, S. FOPPA, M. FIORAVANTI, M. DALZANO, A. COSTA BARBÉ and F. FACCHINETTI

Regulation of the type II thyroxine-5′-deiodinase circadian rhythm in the rat frontal cerebral cortex  
J. M. GUERRERO, C. SANTANA, M. PUIG-DOMINGO, A. GONZALEZ-BRITO and R. J. REITER

Circadian rhythm parameters of clinical and endocrine functions in elderly subjects under treatment with various commonly used drugs  
E. HAUS, G. Y. NICOLAU, D. J. LAKATUA, C. BOGDAN, M. POPESCU, L. SACKETT-LUNDEEN, A. FRABONI and E. PETRESCU

Circadian and ultradian characteristics of plasma growth hormone in children of short stature  
R. C. HERMIDA, L. GARCÍA, C. LODEIRO and T. IGLESIAS

Biorhythmicity and EEG paroxysmal abnormalities in various forms of epileptic seizures  
M. F. MONGE-STRAUSS and F. MIKOL

The role of the lateral geniculate nuclei in phasic response to photic and pharmacologic stimuli  
L. P. MORIN, R. F. JOHNSON, L. SMALE, K. MICHELS and R. Y. MOORE

Testosterone replacement with a circadian pattern  
V. A. PLACE

Circadian rhythm of type II thyroxine-5′-deiodinase activity in the pineal gland: Controlling factors  
R. J. REITER, J. M. GUERRERO, C. SANTANA and M. PUIG-DOMINGO
The role of the hypothalamic suprachiasmatic nucleus in methamphetamine induced rhythms in behavior 99
W. J. RIETVELD, J. RUIS and P. BUIJS

Simultaneous study of LH, cortisol, TSH and melatonin in normal subjects 103
P. SCHULZ, J. RENARD, J. WIDMER, R. RIVEST, P. DICK and R. TISSOT

Stimulating effect of 5-methoxypsoralen on the secretion of melatonin 107
E. SOUETRE, L. TAMARKIN, E. SALVATI, G. PACIOTTI, B. KREBS and G. DARCOURT

The circadian body temperature rhythm in estrous rats: Effects of environmental and endocrine manipulations 111
F. SPENCER, H. B. JOHNSON, J. GANES and B. P. HSI

Time-dependent effects ACTH 1–17 on plasma GH and GH–RH in man 113
Y. TOUITOU, A. REINBERG, P. GARNIER, A. BICAKOVA-ROCHER, Y. MOTOHASHI, A. BOGDAN and A. AUZÉBY

Section 2B — Neurobiology and Psychiatry

Co-chairmen: G. DARCOURT (Nice, France)
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R. REITER (San Antonio, Texas)
W. RIETVELD (Leiden, Netherlands)
Y. TOUITOU (Paris, France)

Changes from circadian to ultradian periodicities of the axillary temperature in three depressive patients 115
A. BICAKOVA-ROCHER, A. REINBERG, A. GORCEIX, Y. MOTOHASHI and J. NOUGUIER

Chronopharmacologic evaluation of an "antifatigue" preparation. A double-blind, placebo control and cross-over study 119
A. BICAKOVA-ROCHER, A. REINBERG, F. LÉVI, A. GORCEIX, Y. TOUITOU and G. METZGER

Chronic clorgyline alters the wheel-running response of Syrian hamsters to continuous bright light 123
W. C. DUNCAN, P. G. SOKOLOVE and T. A. WEHR

Chronopharmacokinetics of imipramine and its metabolite desipramine in brain and plasma after single and chronic application of imipramine in rats 127
L. HOLLE, Z. GÓRKA, B. LANGNER and B. LEMMER
Destruction of suprachiasmatic nuclei serotonergic fibers alters response of hamster activity rhythms to a monoamine oxidase inhibitor
J. S. KRUSE

Time-dependent variations in morphine-induced analgesia
G. LABRECQUE, D. LEPAGE-SAVARY and E. POULIN

Chronic antidepressants (imipramine, citalopram, mianserin) differently affect beta-receptor-effector-system in rat forebrain at different times of day
B. LEMMER and H. GOTTHEINER

Effects of the antidepressant drugs clomipramine, fluoxetine and mianserin on free-running activity rhythms in the rat
P. J. MITCHELL, P. H. REDFERN and J. STOLZ

Section 3 — Theophylline, Bronchodilators and Chest

Co-chairmen: G. D'ALONZO (Houston, Texas)
E. HAUS (St. Paul, Minnesota)
G. KUNKEL (W. Berlin)
J. JONKMAN (Groningen, Netherlands)

Increased nocturnal bronchial hyperreactivity without increased airflow obstruction
W. M. C. VAN AALDEREN, D. S. POSTMA, G. H. KOËTER, J. GERRITSEN and K. KNOL

A study of the circadian rhythm of serum theophylline levels (STLs) in asthmatic children treated with three sustained-release theophylline (SRT) formulations
A. BACULARD, P. AYMARD and G. TOURNIER

A preliminary study of the circadian rhythm of serum theophylline levels (STLs) in asthmatic infants treated with sustained-release theophylline (SRT) formulation
A. BACULARD, J. COUVREUR, B. DUBOIS, P. AYMARD and G. TOURNIER

The utility of the estimated Tw/Ttot in evaluating a long acting sympathomimetic agent used for nocturnal asthma
R. P. BAUGHMAN and R. G. LOUDON

Chronopharmacokinetics of theophylline from a once-a-day tablet dosed in the morning and at night
C. J. BETLACH, A. B. STRAUGHN, E. J. JARVI, C. F. RYAN, J. C. KISICKI and M. A. GONZALEZ
Circadian chronesthesy of the airways of healthy adults to the β-agonist bronchodilator isoproterenol
A. BROWN, M. SMOLENSKY, G. D’ALONZO, H. FRANKOFF, L. GIANOTTI and J. NILSESTUEN

Comparison of the kinetics and effects of sustained-release theophylline scheduled conventionally and once-daily mornings or evenings in adult asthmatics
H. FRANKOFF, M. SMOLENSKY, G. D’ALONZO and J. TOMLINSON

Effect of unequal twice daily theophylline on the circadian variation in the expression of β2-adrenoceptor sites on peripheral mononuclear leucocytes (MNL)
E. HAEN, I. LANGENMAYER, H. EMSLANDER, H. HEUSINGER, M. HALLEK and J. REMIEN

Circadian variation in the expression of β2-adrenoceptor sites in male asthmatic patients
E. HAEN, I. LANGENMAYER, H. EMSLANDER, N. WEBER and J. REMIEN

Appearance of circannual variations of different immune parameters in the bronchoalveolar lavage (BAL) fluid in patients with chronic bronchitis after treatment with a bacterial lysate
M. HALLEK, B. EMMERICH, R. BUSCH, E. HAEN and H. P. EMSLANDER

A pharmacokinetic model of sustained-release theophylline with circadian rhythmic input and correlated with pulmonary function response
A. S. KAPADIA and B. P. HSI

Circadian variations of lymphocyte subpopulations without and with theophylline
G. KUNKEL, C. RAUFFUS, R. KUNZE, B. SIEBERT and D. ALBRIGHT

Circadian variations of β2-adrenoceptors with and without theophylline
G. KUNKEL, B. SIEBERT, M. SUERMONDT, R. SPIERER and D. ALBRIGHT

Circadian rhythm in forced expiratory flows in asthmatic children: Modification after bronchodilators (ipratropium and fenoterol)
Contents

Effect of a mucolytic agent on biologic rhythms of cough and sputum production 195

R. G. LOUDON and R. P. BAUGHMAN

Comparison of the relationship between two measures of bronchial patency, peak expiratory flow (PEF) and forced expiratory volume (FEV₁), over 24 hr under steady-state theophylline treatment 197

A. A. MELTZER, M. H. SMOLENSKY, G. E. D’ALONZO, R. B. HARRIST and P. H. SCOTT

Periodicities of patient admissions to an emergency department for asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and/or theophylline toxicity 201

R. W. MORRIS, J. B. LEIKIN, M. K. PATEL and M. ZELL

Chronopharmacokinetic simulation of a circadian rhythm in theophylline disposition during a constant-rate intravenous infusion of aminophylline in the dog 205

R. J. RACKLEY, M. C. MEYER and A. B. STRAUGHN

Oral morning dosing of corticosteroids in long term treated cortico-dependent asthmatics: Increased tolerance and preservation of the adrenocortical function 209

A. REINBERG, Y. TOUITOU, M. BOTBOL, P. GERVAIS, D. CHAOUAT, F. LÉVI and A. BICAKOVA-ROCHER

Influence of different evening intake times of sustained-release theophylline formulation Euphylong® (BY158) on pharmacokinetics and peak expiratory flow values after individual dose titration 213

B. SIEBERT, G. KUNKEL, K. BORNER, H. W. STAUDINGER and V. W. STEINIJANS

Section 4 — General Chronopharmacology

Co-chairmen: P. BÉLANGER (Québec, Canada)
B. BRUGUEROLLE (Marseille, France)
S. NAKANO (Ehime, Japan)
R. STURTEVANT (Maywood, Illinois)

Circadian periodicity in the glutathione concentration of rat liver 215

P. M. BÉLANGER, M. DESGAGNÉ and B. BRUGUEROLLE

Day–night variations in the activity and composition of the microsomal mixed function oxidase of rat liver 219

P. M. BÉLANGER and M. LALANDE
Bupivacaine chronokinetics in man after a peridural constant rate infusion  
B. BRUGUEROLLE, M. DUPONT, P. LEBRE and G. LEGRE 223

Temporal variations of membrane permeability to local anaesthetic agents, bupivacaine and mepivacaine, documented by their erythrocytic passage  
B. BRUGUEROLLE and M. PRAT 227

Circadian rhythm in serum zinc concentrations in healthy humans  
J. C. CAL, F. DUMAS, F. PELEN, J. M. RAYMOND, J. CAMBAR and M. AMOURETTI 231

The mechanism of the chronhepatotoxicity of chloroform in rat: Correlation between binding to hepatic subcellular fractions and histologic changes  
M. DESGAGNÉ, M. BOUTET and P. M. BÉLANGER 235

Circadian variations in mice erythrocyte membrane permeability to sodium and potassium  
C. DORIAN, P. CATROUX, B. BRUGUEROLLE and J. CAMBAR 239

Insects as animal models for chronopharmacological research  
D. K. HAYES and N. O. MORGAN 243

Dosing-time and sex related differences in the pharmacokinetics of cefodizime as well as in cortisol circadian rhythm  

Circadian variations of nicotine-induced stimulant effects on ambulatory activity and drinking produced by daily administration in rats  
T. KITA, M. SHIRASE, H. KONDOH, T. NAKASHIMA and Y. KUROGOCHI 249

Diurnal variations in the local anesthetic effect of carticaine plus epinephrine (ultracain D-SR) in patients with caries — studies with an electronic pulptester  
B. LEMMER and R. WIEMERS 253

Is acetylator phenotype distribution dependent of circadian rhythms?  
M. OLLAGNIER, J. P. GAY, Y. CHERRAH, H. DECOUSUS and A. REINBERG 257
Retrospective analysis of non-equidistant pharmacological data
   R. PIERRE, J. DE PRINS, E. MALHERBE, P. MANCHON and S. MORE

Chronotoxicity and chronokinetics of two local anaesthetic agents, bupivacaine and mepivacaine, in mice
   M. PRAT and B. BRUGUEROLLE

Diurnal oscillations in salivary levels of quinine following a single dose administration to human volunteers
   B. RAMESH RAO and D. RAMBAU

Circadian ethanol exposure related to fetal growth and development in mice
   I. SAUERBIER

Maturation of circadian behavior rhythms in the first year of human life
   U. SCHMID, R. LANG, M. HALLEK, D. HEIMER-LANG, M. WERRES, R. SCHMID and T. HELLBRÜGGE

A method for the repetitive collection of small blood samples from unanesthetized rats
   K. SCHÜMANN, E. RICHTER and E. HAEN

Analysis of variance in human chronopharmacology. An old method in a new area of research
   K. STEPHAN, R. DOROW, K. WEGSCHREIDER and B. STREITBERG

Section 5 — Ulcerogenesis, H2-Antagonists, Diabetes and Nutrition

Co-chairmen: A. MARKIEWICZ (Katowice, Poland)
              J. MOORE (Salt Lake City, Utah)
              S. SZABO (Boston, Massachusetts)

Ultrannual rhythm of stimulated gastric acid secretion in duodenal ulcer (DU)
   J. P. ACCARY, M. MERROUCHE, D. RIGAUD, J. VATIER and M. MIGNON

Nizatidine 300mg H.S. compared with cimetidine 800mg H.S. in the treatment of acute duodenal ulcer
   M. CLOUD and W. OFFEN

The circadian effect of alloxan-diabetes on the timed regulation of hepatic pyruvate kinase from mice
   R. J. FEUERS, R. A. MITTELSTAEDT, L. E. SCHEVING, T. H. TSAI and J. HUNTER
The suppression of nocturnal acid secretion by H.S. famotidine therapy is sufficient to heal benign gastric ulcers
T. J. HUMPHRIES and R. G. BERLIN

Circadian variations in insulin and alloxan sensitivity noted in blood glucose alterations in normal and diabetic mice
J. D. HUNTER, J. P. McGEE, J. SALDIVAR, T. TSAI, R. FEUERS and L. E. SCHEVING

Circadian variation of catecholamines excretion and skin basic resistance in children with insulin dependent diabetes
D. KIEŁCZEWSKA-MROZIKIEWICZ, A. MROZIKIEWICZ and E. CHMARA

Diet and mealtiming as circadian synchronizers
D. J. LAKATUA, M. HAUS, C. BERGE, L. SACKETT-LUNDEEN and E. HAUS

Seasonal variation in the incidence of bleeding ulcer
A. MARBELLA, D. GRAHAM and M. SMOLENSKY

Chronosupplementation after gastrectomy
A. MARKIEWICZ, H. BOŁDYS, D. SKRZYPEK and J. KALACIŃSKI

Continuous infusion of famotidine maintains high gastric pH in duodenal ulcer (DU)
H. MERKI, L. WITZEL, M. LANGMAN, D. KAUFMANN, J. NEUMANN, J. RÖHMEL and R. WALT

Manipulation of feeding schedule can modify the circadian rhythms of toxicity and kinetics of theophylline in mice
S. NAKANO, S. OHDO and N. OGAWA

Timing of evening meal and ranitidine administration on patterns of 24hr intragastric pH
W. C. ORR, M. ALLEN, A. FINN and M. G. ROBINSON

Circadian rhythms of gastrointestinal peptides in ovariectomized rats: Effects of estradiol and progesterone treatment
J. N. PASLEY and P. L. RAYFORD

Effect of seasonal variations on serum neutral amino acids in response to stress in rat
A. G. ROBERGE

Effect of seasonal variations on blood parameters in response to stress in cat
A. G. ROBERGE and L. THIBAULT
Circadian variation in the pharmacodynamic effect of intravenous ranitidine

S. W. SANDERS, J. G. MOORE, K. N. BUCHI and A. L. BISHOP

Circadian dissociation between drug-induced gastric mucosal lesions and gastric secretion in the rat

S. SZABO, C. ROGERS and K. J. VENER

Relationship between activity—rhythm shift by daytime restricted feeding and ulcer-development in activity—stress procedure

K. WATANABE, C. HARA and N. OGAWA

Section 6 — Cancer

Co-chairmen: I. ASHKENAZI (Tel Aviv, Israel)
C. FOCAN (Liège, Belgium)
R. VON ROEMELING (Lubbock, Texas)
L. SCHEVING (Little Rock, Arkansas)

Twenty-four hour variation in self-administration of morphine sulfate (MS) and hydromorphone (H) by post-surgical gynecologic cancer patients


The role of circadian mitotic control for the promotion of preneoplastic lesions initiated by diethylnitrosamine (DEN)

H. BARBASON, B. BOUZAHZAH and M.-C. MORMONT

Toxicities and tissue pharmacokinetics of oxaliplatin and carboplatin depend upon their dosing time in mice

N. A. BOUGHATTAS, F. LÉVI, B. HECQUET, G. LEMAIGRE, A. ROULON, C. FOURNIER and A. REINBERG

Circadian cellular proliferation in human rectal mucosa

K. N. BUCHI, N. H. RUBIN and J. G. MOORE

Chronotoxicity of anti-cancer drugs: II. Recovery pattern

R. CARLEBACH, M. RAVID, L. PELEG, I. ASHKENAZI and Y. KITAY-COHEN

Modulation of the circadian rhythm in methotrexate toxicity in the rat by melatonin and photoperiod

J. ENGLISH, G. W. AHERNE and J. ARENDT

Observation of circadian variations of serum thymidine kinase levels in control and tumor patients

M. HALLEK, B. EMMERICH, A. REICHLE, H. D. SCHICK, R. SENEKOWITSCH and A. REINBERG
Chronotoxicity of anti-cancer drugs: I. Immediate effects
Y. KITAY-COHEN, I. ASHKENAZI, M. RAVID, L. PELEG and R. CARLEBACH

Circadian rhythm in murine tolerance for the anticancer agent mitomycin-C (MIT-C)
F. KLEIN, L. DANOBER, A. ROULON, G. LEMAIGRE, M. MECHKOURI and F. LÉVI

Circadian gating of DNA synthesis and its relationship to surgical debulking in human ovarian cancer
R. R. KLEVECZ and P. S. BRALY

Etoposide and cisplatin in advanced solid tumors: Results of a study of chronotolerance
I. KRAKOWSKI, F. LÉVI, M. MECHKOURI, T. CONROY, E. LUPORSI, B. WEBER and R. METZ

Treatment of childhood acute lymphoblastic leukemia with 6-mercaptopurine: Circadian variability of efficacy, bioavailability and pharmacokinetics
G. E. RIVARD, K.-T. LIN, C. INFANTE-RIVARD, J. M. LECLERC and F. VARIN

Differential effect of interleukin-2 on $[^3]$H$ $TdR incorporation into DNA in the thymus, spleen and bone marrow of CD2F$_1$ male mice
L. A. SCHEVING, T. H. TSAI, R. J. FEUERS, M. H. SMOLENSKY, J. D. YOUNG and L. E. SCHEVING

A circadian study of cell cycle distribution in non-Hodgkin lymphomas
R. SMAALAND, K. LOTE, O. D. LAERUM and Z. VOKAC

Circadian stage not time of day characterizes doxorubicin susceptibility rhythm of mice in continuous light
R. B. SOTHERN, F. HALBERG and W. J. M. HRUSHESKY

Profound circadian stage dependence of mitomycin-C toxicity

Clinical chronopharmacokinetics of doxorubicin (DXR)
A. SQALLI, J. OUSTRIN, G. HOUIN, R. BUGAT, P. CANAL and M. CARTON

Circadian influence of interleukin-2 in stimulating DNA synthesis in the lung, liver and pancreas of CD2F$_1$ male mice
T. H. TSAI, L. A. SCHEVING, R. J. FEUERS, J. D. YOUNG and L. E. SCHEVING
Sources of variability of dihydropyrimidine dehydrogenase activity in human blood mononuclear cells

M. TUCHMAN, R. v. ROEMELING, R. M. LANNING, R. B. SOTHERN and W. J. M. HRUSHESKY

Round Table — Drug Delivery Systems and Pumps for Timing Medications

Chairman: W. J. M. HRUSHESKY (Minneapolis, Minnesota)

Chronotherapy of patients with metastatic colorectal cancer with 5-fluorouracil (5-FU) and oxaliplatin (1-OHP), automatically delivered via a programmable external pump.

Preliminary results

J. P. CAUSSANEL, F. LÉVI, J. L. MISSET, A. DESCORPS DECLERE, R. ADAM, H. BISMUTH, A. REINBERG and G. MATHE

Time-modulating controlled delivery of peptide/protein drugs for possible applications in chronotherapy

Y. W. CHIEN

Circadian variations of vindesine serum concentrations during continuous infusion

C. FOCAN, V. MAZY, J. ZHOU, R. RAHMANI and J. P. CANO

Implantable therapeutic systems

J. KOST

Ambulatory 5-day chronotherapy of colorectal cancer with continuous venous infusion of 5-fluorouracil (5-FU) at circadian-modulated rate. Preliminary results


Pump delivered insulin and home monitored blood glucose in a diabetic patient: Retrospective and chronophysiologic evaluation of 3-year time series

A. REINBERG, P. DROUIN, M. KOLOPP, L. MÉJEAN, F. LÉVI, G. DEBRY, M. MECHKOURI, G. DI COSTANZO and A. BICAKOVA-ROCHER

Circadian timing and mode of fluoropyrimidine administration markedly impact organ-specific toxicity and maximal dose intensity

R. v. ROEMELING, J. RABATIN, M. TUCHMAN and W. J. M. HRUSHESKY
Feasibility, safety and accuracy of an automated drug delivery system suitable for chronochemotherapy in pediatric patients

Section 7 — Cardiovascular and Renal Systems
Co-chairmen: J. CAMBAR (Bordeaux, France)
H. DECOUSUS (St. Etienne, France)
B. LEMMER (Frankfurt, W. Germany)

Circadian variations in post ischemic acute renal failure in rats
P. CATROUX, C. DORIAN and J. CAMBAR

Role of renin angiotensin system in amikacin chrononephrotoxicity
C. DORIAN, P. CATROUX and J. CAMBAR

Does the circadian variation of $\beta_2$-adrenoceptor sites on peripheral mononuclear leucocytes (MNL) reflect the circadian variation of different MNL subsets?
E. HAEN, T. LEDERER, P. RIEBER, P. SCHLEICHER, I. LANGENMAYER, M. HALLEK and J. REMIEN

24-hour variations in the distribution of labeled microspheres to the intestine, liver and kidneys
G. LABRECQUE, P. M. BÉLANGER, F. DORÉ and M. LALANDE

Nocturnal blood pressure in sleep apnea, effect of nasal continuous positive airway pressure (nCPAP)

Alteration of circadian rhythms of blood pressure by delayed bed-time sleep schedule
Y. MOTOHASHI and T. TAKANO

Circadian variation in digoxin pharmacokinetics
A. MROZIKIEWICZ, A. JABŁECKA, Z. ŁOWICKI and E. CHMARA

Seasonal variations in gentamicin nephrotoxicity in rats
C. PARIAT, P. COURTOIS, J. CAMBAR, A. PIRIOU and S. BOUQUET

Biological rhythms of blood coagulation and of the effect of warfarin in rats
G. SOULBAN and G. LABRECQUE
Circadian variation of prohormone atrial natriuretic factors 1-30, 31-67 and 99-126 in man

Effects of different stimuli (isoprenaline, Gpp(NH)p, forskolin) on circadian rhythms in cAMP content and adenylate cyclase activity in the rat heart
K. WITTE and B. LEMMER

Author Index

Subject Index
CIRCADIAN VARIATION IN THE
EXPRESSION OF ß2-ADRENOCEPTOR
SITES IN MALE ASTHMATIC PATIENTS

E. Haen,¹ I. Langenmayer,¹ H. Emslander,²² N. Weber²²²
and J. Remien

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INTRODUCTION
We recently described a circadian variation in the expression of ß2-adrenoceptor sites
on peripheral mononuclear leucocytes (MNL) from healthy subjects (Pangerl et al 1986, Haen
1987). At night ß2-adrenoceptor density was found to be minimal. This coincides with
the time of lowest respiratory function in both healthy and asthmatic persons (Reinberg et
al 1963, Barnes et al 1980). In asthmatics respiratory function decreases so much at night
that patients are most endangered by attacks at that time of day ("nocturnal asthma",
"nocturnal dip", Hetzel & Clark 1980). In 1968 Szentivanyi suggested that the atopic ab­
normalities in asthmatic disease are related to a malfunction of ß2-adrenoceptors, i.e
either a decreased adrenoceptor density or an impaired sensitivity of these hormone recep­
tors to ß-adrenergic stimuli (Szentivanyi 1968). We therefore studied the circadian varia­
tion of ß2-adrenoceptor density and function in asthmatic patients with predominantly
nocturnal complaints.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
At 14h00, 18h00, 22h00, 02h00, 06h00, 10h00, and again at 14h00 venous blood was drawn
from 4 male asthmatic patients, 19-27 years of age. Two of them demonstrated normal or low
normal respiratory function during daytime (24h-mean of peak expiratory flow + SE: 597±32.6 l/min and 497±29.4 l/min) with a marked nocturnal dip (30.1 and 26.0 % of
24h-mean, respectively) between 02h00 and 06h00. The other two patients showed a similar
nocturnal dip (29.8 and 26.7 % of 24h-mean) from an overall decreased respiratory function
(24h-mean of peak expiratory flow + SE: 335±21.0 l/min and 434±45.8 l/min, Fig. 1). All four men were without any bronchodilator therapy before the study. The sub­
jects were asked to follow a regular life-style for the two weeks preceeding the study
with bed rest between 23h00 and 07h00. On the day of the study the subjects stayed in the
clinical pharmacological research unit of the hospital. They continued to follow their
normal daily routine. Subjects were asked to record meal times, the consumption of alco­
hol and coffein. All were non-smokers.

The blood specimen were immediately assayed for the number of high affinity ß-adrenergic
binding sites (B-max) on intact lymphocytes, using a receptor binding assay (Anhäupl et al. 1988) with ¹²⁵I-cyanopindolol, a β-antagonist. β₂-adrenoceptor coupled adenylate cyclase was stimulated by incubating the intact cells with 10⁻⁷ mol/l isoprenaline for 5 minutes at 37°C; the increase of intracellular cAMP above basal values was determined by radio-immunoassay after cell disruption.

Directly after venepuncture respiratory function was assessed using a computer based, room-restricted spirometer. Among other variables the best of three peak expiratory flow (PEF) readings was recorded.

Circadian variations were statistically validated by the single cosinor method (Halberg et al. 1967) and by analysis of variance (anova). Significance limit was \( p < 0.05 \).

RESULTS

When expressed as % of the 24h-mean the circadian variation in the expression of β₂-adrenoceptor sites on peripheral MNL from male asthmatic patients was significant with a \( p < 0.05 \) (anova). The maximum was seen at 10h00 (1575±462 sites/cell, \( \bar{x} \pm SE \)), the minimum at 02h00 (600±101 sites/cell, Fig. 2). The circadian range was 59.1-135.2 % of the 24h-mean. Cosinor analyses approximated a circadian mesor of 976±51 sites/cell, a circadian amplitude of 475±197 sites/cell (equivalent to 48.7% of mesor), and a circadian acrophase of -198±34° equivalent to 13h14±2h17 (all \( \bar{x} \pm SE \)). The individual single cosinor analyses did not reach statistical significance.

Fig. 1. Peak expiratory flow of untreated male asthmatics (\( \bar{x} \pm SE \)).

Fig. 2. β₂-Adrenoceptor density on peripheral mononuclear leucocytes of healthy men and of untreated male asthmatic patients.
Basal cAMP content of the cells closely paralleled the circadian variation in the expression of β2-adrenoceptor sites. Maximal values were seen between 06h00 and 10h00 (6.0±1.12 pmol/10^6 cells, X±SE), minimal values at 22h00 (3.5±0.95 pmol/10^6 cells, X±SE) with a circadian range of 74.6-126.7 % of 24h-mean (4.8±0.36 pmol/10^6 cells, Fig. 3).

β2-adrenoceptor coupled adenylate cyclase could be stimulated by 10^-7 mol/l isoprenaline to 6.8±0.52 pmol/10^6 cells resulting in a 44±11 % increase over basal cAMP values (24h-mean ± SE, Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Cyclic AMP content of peripheral mononuclear leucocytes from untreated male asthmatic patients before and after in vitro stimulation by 10^-7 mol/l isoprenaline.

DISCUSSION

Studies trying to detect β-adrenoceptor malfunction in asthmatic patients are contradictory in their results (Conolly et al 1976, Scarpace et al 1982, Titinchi et al 1984). In general a difference in the expression of β2-adrenoceptor sites and in their response to isoprenaline could not be clearly observed between healthy and asthmatic people. These studies, however, were not chronobiologically designed and were hampered with pretreatment of the subjects or with inter-individual differences in the pathophysiology of the disease.

The four patients in this study were clearly untreated. The severity of impairment of their respiratory function, however, differed a lot among the individuals (Fig. 1). A circadian variation in the expression of β2-adrenoceptor sites could be observed in these patients that correlated well with the circadian variation in peak expiratory flow. Nevertheless, differences to our healthy control group (Pangerl et al 1986) are, if at all present, very shallow. Most of all the marked nocturnal dip in respiratory function is not paralleled by an equally enlarged decrease in β2-adrenoceptor density compared to the healthy controls (Fig. 2). There is just a tendency towards an increased circadian amplitude in the expression of β2-adrenoceptor sites among the asthmatics, which might still be obscured at that stage of our investigation by the small number of untreated subjects and their large inter-individual differences in respiratory function.

This study suggests that the expression and function of β2-adrenoceptors is not critically linked to pathological abnormalities of peak expiratory flow measurements in nocturnal asthma. However, the results also raise the question of MNL being a useful tissue model for studies of receptor disturbances in humans. It is within reason to assume that data for receptors obtained from the study of MNL do represent the physiological situation in the body; the shielding of certain receptor populations from overall occurring influences (e.g. endocrine effects) constitutes an extraordinary and unnecessary biological expenditure. The same holds true for effects of systemically administered drugs. The results of this study, however, do not preclude isolated, pathological β2-adrenoceptor disturbances in bronchial tissue of asthmatic patients.
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