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The dose related effects of phenylbutazone and a methylprednisolone acetate formulation (Depo-Medrol®) on cultured explants of equine carpal articular cartilage.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

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ABSTRACT

Experimental methods involving the maintenance of explants of equine articular cartilage in tissue culture, an amino sugar assay, radiolabelling, and histology were developed and validated.

The dose related effects of phenylbutazone and Depo-Medrol® on chondrocyte viability and chondrocyte mediated synthesis and depletion of proteoglycans were investigated using cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage. Explants from 12 horses (941 x 3 mm diameter) were cultured for a total of 5 days, which included 3 days exposure to either phenylbutazone (0, 2, 20, 200, 2000 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$), or Depo-Medrol (0, 20, 200, or 2000 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$). For each explant, amino sugar content was used as a measure of proteoglycan content, ^{35}S incorporation as a measure of the rate of proteoglycan synthesis, and the number of pyknotic nuclei as a measure of cell death.

During culture, control explants remained metabolically active and viable but suffered a net loss of proteoglycans. Proteoglycan loss was reduced by the presence of either phenylbutazone or Depo-Medrol. This effect was significant at clinically relevant concentrations of phenylbutazone (2-20 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$), but not Depo-Medrol (20-200 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$). Depo-Medrol caused a dose-dependent suppression of proteoglycan synthesis at all concentrations, but chondrocyte viability was affected at only the 2000 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ dose. Phenylbutazone affected proteoglycan synthesis and cell viability at only the 2000 $\mu\text{g mL}^{-1}$ concentration. At all concentrations, the anti-catabolic effects of each drug influenced the proteoglycan content of the explants far more than did any anti-anabolic or cytotoxic drug effect.

The results suggest that the therapeutic potential of both phenylbutazone and Depo-Medrol may not be just restricted to their anti-inflammatory effects on the soft tissues of the joint, but may also involve a suppression of the synthesis and/or activation of proteolytic enzymes within the cartilage itself.

PREFACE

Lameness has been reported as the number one cause of lost training days and failure to race in the thoroughbred industry (Jeffcott *et al.*, 1982; Rossdale *et al.*, 1985). Joint associated lameness accounted for a third of the lamenesses localised. Causes of joint lameness include soft tissue inflammations, infections, osteochondritis disicans, degenerative joint disease, ligamental problems and intra-articular fractures. All of the above conditions may progress to degenerative joint disease.

Corticosteroids and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) are commonly used to treat degenerative joint disease (osteoarthritis) in animals and man. Degenerative joint disease is characterised by deterioration of the articular cartilage, accompanied by changes to the bone and soft tissues of the joint (McIlwraith, 1982). Treatment aims include resolution of initiating causes, restoration of function, and prevention of further articular cartilage damage (McIlwraith & Vachon, 1988). Because the reparative response of articular cartilage is inadequate (Desjardins & Hurtig, 1990), loss of articular cartilage often limits the complete restoration of athletic function (Bramlage *et al.*, 1988; Richardson & Clark, 1991).

The pathogenesis of degenerative joint disease is incompletely understood (McIlwraith & Vachon, 1988). However, the release of proteoglycans is recognised as one of the earliest responses of articular cartilage to injury (Mankin, 1974; Clyne, 1987). It has been proposed that proteoglycan depletion resulting from increased proteoglycan catabolism may leave the chondrocytes and the collagen structural framework more susceptible to further mechanical damage and thus perpetuate the cycle of degeneration (Harris *et al.*, 1972; McIlwraith & Van Sickle, 1981). The relative significance of chondrocyte mediated proteoglycan catabolism versus that mediated by enzymes released from the synoviocytes and migrant leucocytes has not been established (Fell & Jubb, 1977; McIlwraith & Van Sickle, 1981; Martel-Pelletier *et al.*, 1984; Hurtig, 1988; McIlwraith & Vachon, 1988; May *et al.*, 1991). Cytokine and drug induced

suppression of proteoglycan synthesis may also contribute to the proteoglycan depletion in some osteoarthritic conditions (Palmoski & Brandt, 1983; MacDonald *et al.*, 1992; May *et al.*, 1992).

Methylprednisolone acetate (MPA) and phenylbutazone (PBZ) are the most common steroid and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs used for treatment of joint injury in equine athletes. Their soft tissue mediated clinical effects are well recognised (Higgins & Lees, 1984). Whether or not they also confer some degree of chondroprotection is actively debated (Tobin *et al.*, 1986; Burkhardt & Ghosh, 1987; McIlwraith, 1989). Furthermore, there is some evidence to suggest their use may actually potentiate the progression of joint deterioration (Whitehouse & Bostrum, 1962; Tobin *et al.*, 1986; Chunekamrai *et al.*, 1989; Trotter *et al.*, 1991; Shoemaker *et al.*, 1992). Both the types and mechanisms of their effects on articular cartilage are subjects of some conjecture and much controversy (May *et al.*, 1987; McIlwraith & Vachon, 1988; Saari *et al.*, 1992).

Relatively few controlled *in vivo* trials have sought to investigate the effects of MPA or PBZ on equine articular cartilage. Interpretation of specific drug effects from these trials has been hindered by their small sample numbers, the types of investigative procedures performed, and a range of confounding variables. The *in vitro* maintenance of tissue allows for a more controlled environment in which the study of specific interactions can be isolated from confounding variables (Tyler *et al.*, 1982).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the dose related effects of phenylbutazone, and a methylprednisolone acetate formulation (Depo-Medrol®)¹, on chondrocyte viability, and chondrocyte mediated degradation and synthesis of matrix proteoglycans so as to better understand how these drugs exert their effects *in vivo*. The following three hypotheses were tested with respect to each of these parameters; (1) the drug is capable of affecting the parameter, (2) the effect is apparent at clinically relevant concentrations, and (3) the effect is greater at higher concentrations.

¹ Depo-Medrol, Upjohn Inter-American Corporation.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	ii
PREFACE	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	xiii
LIST OF TABLES	xviii

INTRODUCTION

A. Articular cartilage structure and function

1. The chondrocytes 2
2. Collagen 4
3. The proteoglycans 5
4. Measures of matrix biosynthesis and depletion 7
5. Response to injury 11

B. Use of intra-articular corticosteroids in the horse

1. Anti-inflammatory mechanism of action 14
2. Manufacturer recommendations 18
3. Pharmacokinetics 19
4. Clinical use 21
5. Adverse effects on joints 22

C. Effects of corticosteroids on articular cartilage

1. Normal articular cartilage 24
 - (i) Chondrocyte morphology 25
 - (ii) Matrix biosynthesis and depletion;
in vivo results 25
 - (iii) Matrix biosynthesis and depletion;
in vitro results 27
2. Articular cartilage of arthritic joints 28
3. Articular cartilage repair 29

D. Use of phenylbutazone in the horse

1.	Molecular mechanism of action	31
2.	Manufacturer recommendations	34
3.	Pharmacokinetics	
	(i) Absorption	35
	(ii) Distribution	35
	(iii) Metabolism and elimination	37
	(iv) Oxyphenbutazone kinetics	38
4.	Clinical use	39
5.	Adverse effects on joints	40

E. Effect of phenylbutazone on articular cartilage

.....	40
-------	----

F. Summary

.....	42
-------	----

G. Objectives

.....	43
-------	----

H. Hypotheses

.....	43
-------	----

MATERIALS AND METHODS

SECTION I: DEVELOPMENT OF THE MODEL

A. Analytical techniques

1. Biochemical analyses 44
2. Scintillation counting 54
3. DNA assay 64

B. Measurement of proteoglycans in the culture media

1. Factors affecting the amino sugar assay 67
2. Methods to reduce media and drug interference 72
3. Separation of chondroitin sulphate from solutions
containing serum proteins 79
4. Separation of proteoglycans from solutions containing
serum proteins 89
5. Summary 93

C. Explant culture characteristics

1. Variation in the amino sugar content and rate of ^{35}S
incorporation between explants from different sites 96
2. Viability of chondrocytes in cultured explants of
equine articular cartilage 99
3. Variation in the biosynthetic rate and total amino sugar
concentration relative to time cultured 106

SECTION II: USE OF THE MODEL

A. Explant Culture

1. Source of articular cartilage 111
2. Preparation of cartilage samples 111
3. Methylprednisolone acetate trial 114
4. Phenylbutazone trial 115

B. Post-culture processing

1. Explants from the radial carpal bones 115
2. Explants from the third carpal bones 116

C. Analytical techniques

1. Amino sugar assay 116
2. Scintillation counting procedure 116
3. Histological evaluation 117

D. Statistical methods

1. Explants from the radial carpal bones 117
2. Explants from the third carpal bones 117

RESULTS

A. Depo-Medrol (MPA) trial

1. Effect of Depo-Medrol on amino sugar content 119
2. Effect of Depo-Medrol on ³⁵S incorporation 119
3. Effect of Depo-Medrol on chondrocyte viability 122

B. Phenylbutazone (PBZ) trial

1. Effect of PBZ on amino sugar content 124
2. Effect of PBZ on ³⁵S incorporation 124
3. Effect of PBZ on chondrocyte viability 127

C. Histological trial observations

. 129

DISCUSSION

A. Discussion of the methods	
.....	134
B. Discussion of the results	
.....	140
C. Summary and conclusions	
.....	148

APPENDIX

A. Tables	
.....	150
B. Statistical analyses	
.....	161

BIBLIOGRAPHY

.....	170
-------	-----

FIGURES

2.1	Comparison of the absorption spectra of glucosamine and galactosamine (from 5-20 μg)	47
2.2	Comparison of the absorption spectra of equivalent amounts of glucosamine, galactosamine, and chondroitin sulphate	47
2.3	Absorption spectra of digested cartilage	49
2.4	Comparison of the standard curves of glucosamine, galactosamine, and chondroitin sulphate	50
2.5	The gradation of colours produced by a range of glucosamine amounts (2.5-20 μg) after being assayed according to the method of Gatt & Berman. The cuvette containing the yellow/orange solution is an example of the sensitivity of the assay to any variation in acidity	51
2.6	Stability of the amino sugar assay over time	53
2.7	Custom made cartilage chisel	55
2.8	Cartilage punches	56
2.9	Quench curve generated by ^{14}C quenched standards	60
2.10	The effect of different wash procedures on the non-bound ^{35}S content of explants of equine articular cartilage	62
2.11	Standard curve for calf thymus DNA assayed according to the method of Labarca and Paigen (1980)	66

2.12	Absorption spectra of glucosamine standards dissolved in water . . .	68
2.13	Absorption spectra of glucosamine standards dissolved in DMEM . .	68
2.14	Absorption spectra of glucosamine standards dissolved in DMEM and assayed after oven digestion in 2N HCl	68
2.15	Absorption spectra produced by DMEM, aqueous phenol red, and a 25% aqueous DMEM solution in response to the Gatt & Berman (1966) amino sugar assay (relative to a H ₂ O blank, A = 0.5)	74
2.16	Absorption spectra of chondroitin sulphate standards dissolved in DMEM following dialysis and oven digestion in 2N HCl (A = 2.0)	74
2.17	Absorption spectra of DMEM and gentamicin following dialysis and oven digestion in 2N HCl (relative to a H ₂ O blank, A = 2.0)	77
2.18	Comparison of chondroitin sulphate standards dissolved in water and DMEM after dialysis and oven digestion	78
2.19	The absorption spectrum produced by a crude papain solution	81
2.20	Comparison of the absorption spectrum of glucosamine, and a glucosamine + papain combination	83
2.21	Effect of papain on the assay of glucosamine standards	84
2.22	Effect of serum protein precipitation on the amino sugar concentration of chondroitin sulphate standards	87

2.23	Effect of serum protein precipitation and dialysis on the absorption spectra of aqueous chondroitin sulphate standards	88
2.24	Effect of serum protein precipitation and dialysis on the absorption spectra of chondroitin sulphate standards dissolved in DMEM	88
2.25	Effect of culture duration on the viability of chondrocytes within explants of equine articular cartilage	102
2.26	Photomicrograph showing cell death at the edge of a cultured explant of equine carpal articular cartilage	103
2.27	Photomicrograph showing cell death at the articular edge of a cultured explant of equine carpal articular cartilage	104
2.28	Photomicrograph showing cell vacuolation in a cultured explant of equine carpal articular cartilage	105
2.29	Effect of culture duration on the amino sugar content of explants relative to their initial wet weight	108
2.30	Effect of culture duration on the amino sugar content of explants relative to their final DNA content	108
2.31	Effect of culture duration on ³⁵ S incorporation by explants relative to their initial wet weight	109
2.32	Effect of culture duration on ³⁵ S incorporation by explants relative to their final DNA content	109

3.1	Photograph of an open equine middle carpal joint showing the sites (top = third carpal bone, bottom = radial carpal bone) where the strips of articular cartilage were harvested from	112
3.2	Strip of articular cartilage from which explants have been cut	113
3.3	Explants suspended in chilled DMEM awaiting further processing	113
4.1	Effect of Depo-Medrol on the amino sugar content of cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage	120
4.2	Effect of Depo-Medrol on ³⁵ S incorporation by cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage	121
4.3	Effect of Depo-Medrol on the viability of chondrocytes within cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage	123
4.4	Effect of phenylbutazone on the amino sugar content of cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage	125
4.5	Effect of phenylbutazone on ³⁵ S incorporation by cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage	126
4.6	Effect of phenylbutazone on the viability of chondrocytes within cultured explants of equine middle carpal joint articular cartilage	128
4.7	Photomicrograph of an empty lacunae with the displaced nucleus sitting adjacent (1000x magnification)	130

4.8	Photomicrograph of two dead chondrocytes close to the articular surface (4000x magnification)	131
4.9	Photomicrograph of a chondrocyte cluster (4000x magnification)	132
4.10	Comparison of the variation in proteoglycan content, as shown by alcian blue staining, of two sections cut from non-cultured explants harvested from the radial carpal bone of the same horse (400x magnification)	133

TABLES

2.1	DNA assay of digested cartilage samples	65
2.2	Chemical composition of Dulbecco's modified Eagle medium (DMEM)	70
2.3	Amino sugar assay absorbances following the addition of TCA and dialysis (524 nm)	90
2.4	Amino sugar assay absorbances following the addition of NH ₄ SO ₄ and dialysis (524 nm)	93
2.5	Variability in the amino sugar content (AS) of cultured explants from different carpal bones ($\mu\text{g mg}^{-1}$)	98
2.6	Variability in the incorporation of ³⁵ S by cultured explants from different carpal bones (dpm mg ⁻¹)	98
2.7	Chondrocyte death relative to time cultured (dead/total)	101