Continuing Medical Education

CME MCQ – 9

Focus on Alopecia Areata

Evidence is compelling that alopecia areata (AA) is a tissue-specific autoimmune disease. Numerous data have found a positive association with HLA immunoregulatory genes.

1. Autoantibodies as well as autoreactive T cells to hair follicles have been found in biopsies of AA. Which of the following is not correct:
   A. Anti hair follicle antibodies have been found in normal controls
   B. The target autoantigen has been characterized
   C. The anagen hair follicle is a site of immuneprivilege like the eye
   D. Anti-hair follicle antibodies are modulated during the disease process

2. It has been estimated that 3-5% of AA patients have another autoimmune or endocrine disease. Each of the following statements regarding AA-associated conditions is true except:
   A. Incidence of clinically evident thyroid abnormalities is significantly increased
   B. Prevalence of diabetes mellitus in relatives is increased
   C. The incidence of vitiligo is increased in AA
   D. AA does appear to be increased in patients with Down's syndrome
   E. Decreased serum ferritin is associated with alopecia areata in women

Recommended answers (based on J Investig Dermatol Symp Proc.8(2), Oct 2003):

1. B: The last few years of research have yielded much information on the etiology and complex pathogenesis of AA but the autoantigen(s) remains to be identified.

2. A: Careful review of the AA literature, despite contradictory results, indicates that incidence of clinically evident thyroid abnormalities such as Hashimoto's chronic lomphocyte thyroiditis, thyrotoxicosis, exophthalmic goiter, and myxedema does not differ significantly in AA from controls. By contrast, there is growing evidence of an increase in the prevalence of diabetes mellitus, especially type I insulin-dependent diabetes, in relatives with AA but not in patients themselves.