Heart Disease in SLE Called ‘Startlingly Worrying’

**By Nancy Walsh**

**London** — The incidence of coronary heart disease among young women with systemic lupus erythematosus is “startlingly worrying,” Ian Bruce, M.D., said at the Sixth European Lupus Meeting.

Studies have shown that the annual incidence of ischemic heart disease in lupus patients is 1.3%-1.5%. In comparison, the incidence among those with newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes and among those who have had a first myocardial infarction is 2%-2.2% per annum. “This latter number may be higher,” he said. “But classic risk factors do not tell the whole story. (See box.) In the general population, you virtually do not see plaque, whereas women with lupus are beginning to acquire plaque that early age,” Dr. Bruce said.

Classic Risk Factors Don’t Tell the Whole Story

According to Mrs. McHenry, there appeared to be no association between cervical dysplasia and other traditional risk factors such as higher levels of LDL cholesterol and triglycerides (Arthritis Rheum. 2003;48:3159-67).

Other risk factors, including age at first sexual contact and history of ever having used oral contraceptives, were not associated with increased risk of cervical dysplasia. “And surprisingly, there was no association between abnormal cervical smear history and tobacco smoking,” he said. (See chart.) Although a correlation was seen between high disease activity scores and history of cervical smear abnormality, there was no correlation with lupus damage scores or duration of disease. Exposure to corticosteroids and immunosuppressive agents also did not differ between patients with and without abnormal cervical smear histories.

Further analyses will consider cumulative immunosuppressive doses and will compare human papillomavirus DNA findings between lupus patients and controls.

Cervical Dysplasia Common Among Patients With Lupus

**By Nancy Walsh**

**London** — Women with lupus face an elevated risk of having cervical dysplasia, but the underlying cause of such pathology is still unclear, Michelle T. McHenry, M.B., B.S., said at the Sixth European Lupus Meeting.

Unlike the situation for healthy women, there appeared to be no association between cervical dysplasia and other traditional risk factors, such as a history of sexually transmitted disease, in a cohort of 221 women with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) identified through hospital records and the Northern Ireland pathology database.

Among this entire cohort, 74 (33%) had a lifetime history of having had at least one abnormal cervical smear. Dr. McHenry reported.

Of those, 45% had had more than one abnormal smear and 26% had had a high-grade abnormality, she said.

From the entire cohort, 141 patients agreed to participate in a study that involved answering a risk factor questionnaire and providing a current cervical smear. Adequate smears were obtained from 133 patients.

Low-grade abnormalities were found on 22 (17%) of these smears, which is twice the expected incidence, according to the Northern Ireland statistics. High-grade abnormalities were identified on six (5%), which is three times the expected incidence, said Dr. McHenry. A rheumatologist at Queen’s University, Belfast, examined 21 abnormal smears.

One abnormality was detected after the time of diagnosis of lupus in 63% of patients. “Patients with SLE are at increased risk of cervical cancer but the reasons why are unclear, whether it is related to having the disease itself, to having active disease, or to the treatments we administer, or if traditional cervical cancer risk factors have a part to play,” Dr. McHenry said.

“When we assessed these patients for traditional cervical cancer risk factors, we found they were more likely to have had more sexual partners and more children,” she said.