BY MIRIAM E. TUCKER
Senior Writer

ORLANDO—A deficiency of vitamin D is extremely common among patients with diabetes and other endocrine conditions, according to findings from two recent studies.

In one study Dr. Kanakasabai Narasimhan and Dr. Ali A. Rizvi of the University of South Carolina, Columbia, looked at 97 patients who were seen at their institution’s diabetes unit. The group comprised 39 men and 58 women, with an average age of 55 years. Two-thirds of the patients were white and one-third were black. They found that 38% of the patients had vitamin D deficiency (below 20 ng/mL), 17% had mild deficiency (20-32 ng/mL), and 25% had moderate deficiency (33-49 ng/mL).

In the other study, the researchers reviewed the medical records of 326 patients treated at a diabetes unit. The group included 59 patients aged 60 years and older. The mean age was 59 years, and 23.5 ng/mL among those aged 60 years and older. The mean 25(OH)D value was also slightly lower among those with poorer diabetes control (22.54 ng/mL for the patients with HbA1c levels above 7%, compared with 24.3 ng/mL for those who had HbA1c levels of 7% or lower).

Although none of these correlations was statistically significant, the findings may still be clinically important in a selected population. "Alternatively, the lack of a clear-cut association with any single parameter may be due to the general risk that the presence of diabetes imparts, and the high prevalence of vitamin D deficiency in the general population," Dr. Narasimhan and Dr. Rizvi said.

Regardless, until the data are confirmed, "consultation and treatments are recommended for screening for vitamin D deficiency in the diabetic population," they concluded.

In a third study, which was also presented in a poster at the meeting, Dr. Sye da Zaidi and Dr. Thomas A. Hughes of the University of Tennessee, Memphis, reviewed the charts of 262 patients seen over a 6-year period at a private endocrinology-lipid clinic. The "relatively healthy, affluent" group had a mean age of 59.9 years (range, 21-88 years); 89% were white, 7% black, and 4% were female. The mean serum calcium level was 9.6 mg/dL (range, 7.8-11.0 mg/dL) and serum creatinine was 1.0 mg/dL (range, 0.5-2.0 mg/dL). One-fourth had known osteopenia or osteoporosis. Other diagnoses included hyperlipidemia (92%), type 2 diabetes (60%), and thyroid disease (28%).

Severe 25(OH)D deficiency (below 10 ng/mL) was present in 6% of the patients, moderate deficiency (10-20 ng/mL) in 32%, and mild deficiency (20-32 ng/mL) in 35%. Only 11% had levels considered satisfactory (above 40 ng/mL). These patients were typically younger and/or on low-dose vitamin D supplements. However, 25% of the patients with 25(OH)D levels below 15 ng/mL were taking low-dose vitamin D supplements, and 58% were taking multivitamin supplements.

Moreover, only one of the 18 black patients in the group had 25(OH)D levels above 32 ng/mL, noted Dr. Zaidi and Dr. Hughes. They also pointed out that their institution is located in the Sunbelt, where one might expect to see higher 25(OH)D levels than elsewhere in the country.

"Vitamin D deficiency and secondary hyperparathyroidism are associated with metabolic bone disease, myopathy, cardiomyopathy, and renal disease, and may lead to osteoporosis. Therefore, this high incidence of deficit could have widespread clinical consequences," they commented.

Many Diabetic, Endocrine Patients Lack Vitamin D

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