EDITIONAL

Recurring Series of Excess Deaths and Medical Admissions in Scotland Due to a Potential Infectious Etiology

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Dr. Rodney Jones, in his publication in Biomedicine International, reviews a national experience in Scotland where infectious-like events have resulted in an increased rate of emergency department presentations, hospital admissions, and deaths, which over time, appeared in a spike like fashion. Data were collected from 1990 to 2012, which showed particularly high death rates in January 1990, 1996, 1997, 2000 and February 2000. Comparisons are made to other similar reports from around the world e.g. Australia. An interesting feature is mentioned regarding the change in the shape of the time trend for each outbreak from before 2000 to after and the potential cause of this being the decline to a 100 year minimum of influenza activity in the year 2000. The author concludes that an infectious-like outbreak, which is presumably viral, has resulted in an incremental cost of 6 billion pounds for the NHS in England with commercial affects across the UK and beyond. A minimum estimate of an excess of 20 to 30,000 deaths has been attributed to such outbreaks.

In the Discussion, cytomegalovirus is mentioned and suggested as a possible reason for such outbreaks. Other studies have also considered this ubiquitous herpes virus. A study by McElhaney et al., from 2012 has shown a 4-time lower response rate to influenza vaccination in those over 65 years of age. The author rightfully points out that CMV antibody titers are greatest in this population. The author mentions one study by Musiani et al. from 1988 where 39% of geriatric inpatients were infected with cytomegalovirus versus only 13% in the control group.

Dr. Jones should be congratulated for his analysis of an apparent widespread problem. The data were presented in a logical manner and salient literature is reviewed. I would have like to have seen more details regarding the clinical presentations and causes of death as well as a break down of ages, the take home message of the paper and its review is the same. However, this might be the topic of a future publication from this author.

For additional reading on this topic, Dr. Jones has written a detailed review titled “Could cytomegalovirus be causing widespread outbreaks of chronic poor health?” and published in Hypotheses in Clinical Medicine, Shoja MM et al. (eds) by Nova Biomedical in 2013. This textbook chapter details the subject in an eloquent manner.

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