

Correspondence

Is the determination of cord blood total IgE levels any value in the prediction of atopic disease?

Sirs, two articles have appeared in recent issues of *Clinical and Experimental Allergy* referring to this topic [1,2]. We are glad that the data presented in both confirm our original report that there is no threshold value of total IgE in cord blood that can be used to predict atopy [3], but disappointed that the authors failed to cite the original study. This oversight seems also to have afflicted your reviewers. In the mid-1980s it was taken for granted that cord blood total IgE levels were of value [4-7] and our careful study was the only one to go against the tide of opinion. In at least one European country the cost of laboratory testing was, and still is, reimbursable on that basis.

However, as well as exhibiting our pique, we also want to be constructive. Criticisms that could be levelled at all papers are that (i) children have not been followed for a sufficient time for atopy to develop and (ii) in babies the diagnosis of asthma could be confused with other respiratory complaints. Our large-scale study of 500 babies at high risk of atopic disease commenced in 1982 and the children evaluated for atopic symptoms after 3, 6 and 12 months and again aged 4 and 7 years; these symptoms have been correlated with a large number of factors that might trigger atopy. At no time have we found a threshold value of total IgE in cord blood that can be used to predict the atopic symptoms observed.

In the recent IAACI meeting in Kyoto Dr Croner also made a similar pronouncement.

References

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Since submitting our paper on the insensitivity of the cord IgE [1] we have become aware of an earlier study from South Wales [2]. This study concluded, as did we, that the cord IgE level did not predict either eczema or wheeze at age 12 months. We understand that follow-up of the Welsh children at age 4 and 7 years corroborates the assessment at a year (Merrett T.G., personal communication).

References

- 1 Hide DW, Arshad SH, Twiselton R, Stevens M. Cord serum IgE: an insensitive method for the prediction of atopy. *Clin Exp Allergy* 1991; 21:739-43.
- 2 Merrett TG, Burr ML, Butland BK, Merrett J, Miskelly FG, Vaughan-Williams E. Infant feeding and allergy: 12-month prospective study of 500 babies born into allergic families. *Ann Allergy* 1988; 61:13-24.

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