

Letter to the editor

Drs. Wahn, Ernsting & Peterson suggest in their report (Allergy 1990: 45: 109–14) that spontaneous basophil histamine releasability may not be important in allergic disorders, or reflect allergic disease activities. They also pointed out the difference in measurable histamine released from washed cells or whole blood from the same subjects.

There are two important facts about the study which may have led to overstatement of the meaning of the results. The first is subject sample. According to the authors, the study volunteers were off systemic medications for at least 3 weeks. We have no idea of how symptomatic the subjects were. This is critical to their hypothesis. Other investigators have demonstrated that spontaneous basophil histamine release may correlate with if not contribute to disease activity. The trend is for this abnormality to return to normal values as the allergic disorder is controlled. The second concern is the total histamine content of the different specimens. This is not mentioned, but a standard histamine curve can be run along with the cells. I believe we all agree that the absolute amount of mediator release is important in disease.

Without approaches which consider the disease activity in each patient, the authors conclusions are unsubstantiated.

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References

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Reply

We thank Dr. Mansfield for his important comments regarding the role of mediators from basophils for different allergic diseases.

1. As far as systemic medication in our patients is concerned, we only selected individuals who could be taken off systemic steroids, theophylline, antihistamines and ketotifen, since we were aware of the fact that different drugs might influence spontaneous release of mediators. The asthmatics who were selected for the study had a mild to moderate asthma and were sufficiently controlled by DSCG inhalation, which has previously been shown not to influence mediator release from basophils.

2. The total histamine content of the samples was determined in each case. Between the different patient groups, there were no statistically significant differences in total histamine content.

As far as in the *in vivo* relevance of spontaneous mediator release from basophils is concerned, we would conclude from our data that intravascular spontaneous histamine release is unlikely to be important. As we discussed in the paper, spontaneous mediator release from basophils may be relevant after the cells have left the blood vessels and emigrated into the paravascular tissue.

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