

Correspondence

In re: JACI 1990;85:138 by Dr. Daniel, "Skin testing"

To the Editor:

The letter by Dr. Daniel (J ALLERGY CLIN IMMUNOL 1990;85:138) caused me to reread the Proceedings of the Task Force on Guidelines for Standardizing Old and New Technologies Used for the Diagnosis and Treatment of Allergic Diseases (J ALLERGY CLIN IMMUNOL 1988;82:487-526). Instead of the "open criticism" promised, I found a thoughtful critique of skin testing techniques.

This result certainly does not relate to any problems with standardization or lack thereof. It also does not tell us whether the arbitrary cut-off point between negative and positive test results is correct. Those two questions need to be addressed both in in vitro and in vivo systems. The result, however, demonstrates that skin tests as they are done in a practicing allergist's office are precise. Skin testing requires skill and attention to detail but is not an art. The reading of skin tests is objective. The interpretation of the test result will remain subjective, particularly in the gray area of

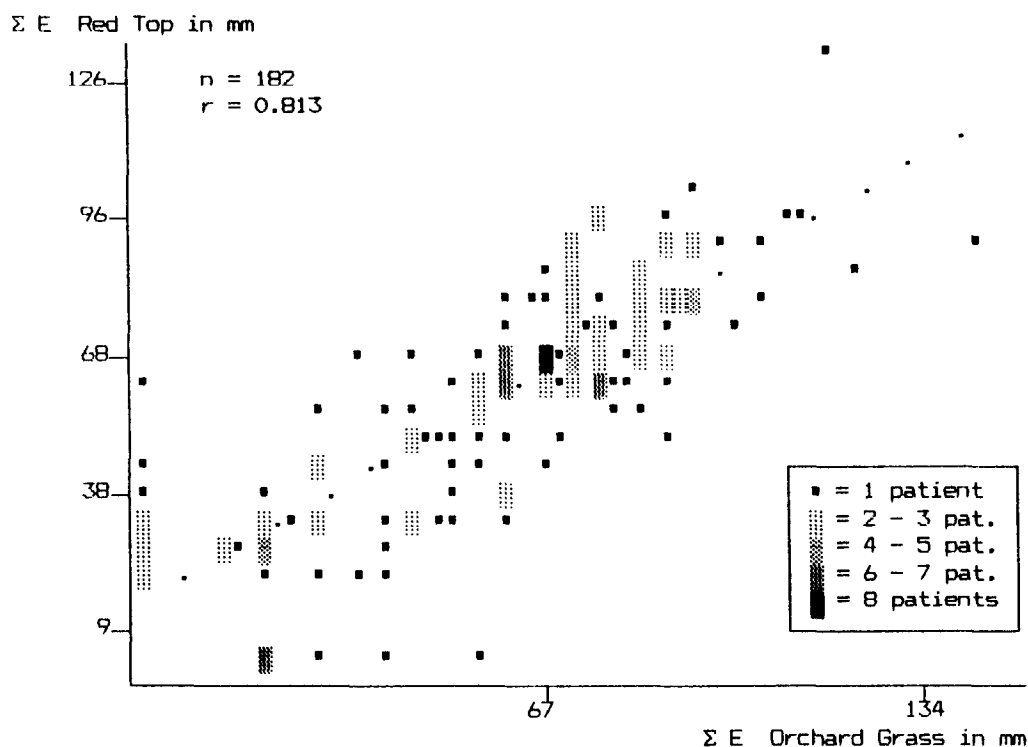


FIG. 1. Sum of diameters of erythema produced by prick tests with redtop and orchard grass.

In our office, we recorded during a 12-month period, all skin test results. As a measurement, we used the sum of the longest diameter of the erythema and the midpoint orthogonal diameter. At that time we tested for both redtop and orchard grass, which have a known high degree of cross-reactivity. We had 182 patients who were tested for both redtop and orchard grass and had a sum of 20 mm or more for at least one of the two grasses (Fig. 1). The test results correlated very well with a correlation coefficient of 0.813. Two tests with the same extract may have correlated even better.

weakly positive reactions. This is equally true for in vitro and in vivo tests. Standardization will allow us to share our experiences and it will narrow but not eliminate this gray area. We then will also know better when a quantitative test is desirable and when a semiquantitative or qualitative test is appropriate.

Heinrich K. Brucker, MD
Southdale Medical Building, Suite 325
6545 France Ave. S
Minneapolis, MN 55435