

The Pathogenesis of the Allergic Phenotype

To the Editor,

Dr. D. H. Katz's (2) article on the "Regulation of the IgE System..." is a most thorough and up-to-date review of our present understanding of the IgE system. In particular it provides a valuable insight into the regulatory mechanism controlling this sophisticated and delicate antibody system.

We enthusiastically agree with the concept which the author prefers to call "allergic breakthrough" as well as with his schematic illustration (Fig. 1). However, we think that this concept and the illustration represent only one aspect of the "pathogenesis of the allergic phenotype" and do not clarify all the factors involved in this complex phenomenon. There is enough evidence today to show that the border between the allergic and the nonallergic zone is neither fixed nor constant and cannot be illustrated by a linear line. It may vary for different patients (or experimental animals) (1, 3), and/or for the same patient at different times and/or for the same time at different target organs.

The levels of IgE certainly play a key role in the pathogenesis of the immediate type allergy but the susceptibility of the mast cell to this antibody and their ability to release histamine must also be considered when discussing allergic symptoms. Differences in the susceptibility of the mast cells to IgE would explain how even patients with low IgE levels might develop atopic diseases, namely by possessing high susceptibility of their mast cells to IgE.

The author presented a didactic and thorough review of the regulation of the IgE system and thus fulfilled what the title of the article promised. The minor comment that the author goes too far with his view that the concept of the "allergic breakthrough" could explain the

"pathogenesis of the allergic phenotype" should by no means detract from the overall value of this paper.

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