

Correspondence

Reply

To the Editor:

We have read the comments of Zhong et al¹ on our study of treatment of resistant chronic urticaria with alprazolam² with great interest.

The 8 patients in the study and the other 4 patients with criteria of chronic urticaria who finally accepted this treatment all had a totally satisfactory response after a month of treatment with alprazolam 2 mg 3 times daily. The most common side effect was sedation during the first days, which was greatly reduced after 2 weeks of treatment. After 1 month, we initiated a progressive 3-month reduction in the alprazolam dose (withdrawing 2 mg in the second and third months and 1 mg in the fourth month). If the urticaria did not reappear by the sixth month, we advised patients to continue taking 0.25 mg before sleeping. After 6 further months of treatment, 8 patients stopped taking alprazolam without relapses or adverse effects, and 4 continued to take it to help them sleep.

Currently, it is difficult to demonstrate the pathophysiological mechanisms that led to this favorable response. As Zhong et al¹ state, the mechanism of action of alprazolam in chronic urticaria, a disease that seems to have an autoimmune pathogenesis, is unknown.³ One possibility is that in our patients, who had heightened levels of stress associated with failure of therapy for a disease that severely affected their quality of life and other personal factors, the antianxiety effect of alprazolam may have reduced stress, as has been reported in the treatment of adolescents with asthma⁴ and other diseases of possible autoimmune etiology, such as type 1 diabetes,⁵ thereby improving the clinical symptoms. We agree with our colleagues that the mechanism of

action should be clarified, but this would require clinical double-blind placebo-controlled trials with a larger number of patients. We found only 12 patients who fulfilled the criteria of severe refractory idiopathic urticaria of more than 10 years of evolution in our database of 558 patients with idiopathic chronic urticaria compiled over 23 years.

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