Ivabradine as a Treatment Option for Inappropriate Sinus Tachycardia

To the Editor:

Inappropriate sinus tachycardia or non paroxysmal tachycardia is characterised by persistent cardiac arrhythmias, with sinus P waves, and an exaggerated response to a minimal physical effort. It usually appears in young women and manifests through palpitations, dyspnoea, fatigue, and intolerance to exercise. After excluding other types of tachycardia and discarding secondary symptoms of other affectations, the reproduction of symptoms during an episode of tachycardia allowed for confirmation of the diagnosis. Beta-blockers and calcium channel blockers are the most frequently used medications for treating symptomatic patients and in general are not tolerated well at the doses required for the control of tachycardia. Invasive treatment with selective or complete catheter ablation of the sinoatrial node is not exempt from complications and on occasions requires the implantation of a permanent pacemaker. Ivabradine is a selective inhibitor of the I_{f} channels that has recently been approved for the treatment of stable angina pectoris. It is considered an attractive alternative for heart rate control in inappropriate sinus tachycardia.

We shall present the case of a 29-year-old woman with a history of smoking and a difficult twin labour 2 years earlier. Over the preceding months and almost on a daily basis, she had been experiencing frequent episodes of general asthenia with palpitations, nausea and a suffocating sensation. One of these episodes included atypical chest pain and signs of presyncope, for which she was attended to in the emergency service of a nearby hospital. The physical examination and the diagnostic tests revealed no significant alterations, except for the sinus tachycardia at 105 beats/min and borderline low blood pressure of 90/60 mm Hg. After being kept under observation, she was assessed in the chest pain unit with echocardiography, chest x-ray and thyroid hormone and catecholamine analysis, all of which were normal. During the exercise stress test, she surpassed 85% of the MHR in the first stage of the Bruce Protocol Test and finally reached 97% of the MHR and 11 MET, with no data indicating myocardial ischaemia. On discharge, she was diagnosed with an anxiety disorder and was prescribed treatment with sedatives, which did not improve the symptoms. She was referred to a local psychiatrist, who found no illness and discarded anxiety as a cause of the symptoms. New diagnoses were contemplated in the internal medicine unit,
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only for treatment of stable angina, its mechanism would infer an eventual benefit in the patient’s disorder. The patient accepted the treatment, which was started with a dose of 10 mg/day and later increased to 15 mg/day. This last treatment
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A 26-year-old woman, with no relevant personal or family history, experienced 3 resting syncopal episodes with tonic convulsions in a period of 2 months. The physical examination, electrocardiogram, echocardiogram, programmed stimulation, and a provocation test with flecainide were normal or negative. A subcutaneous Holter was implanted (Reveal® Plus Medtronic, Inc.) which was consulted a fortnight later after a new syncope with the same features. Ventricular fibrillation (VF) was substantiated (Figure, A) initiated by a ventricular extrasystole (VE) (Figure, B, arrows). In the minute prior to the event, a large density of VE from the same focus with fixed coupling (Figures, A and B). The VF was maintained for almost 3 minutes and spontaneously ceased (Figure, C), the VE disappeared in the following minutes (Figure, A). An ablation of the VE was attempted which set off the VF, but its reproduction was not possible during the electrophysiological study. The implanting of a defibrillator was decided on. Two months later, the patient underwent treatment with beta blockers and no clinical events were registered.

The VF that occurs in the absence of structural heart disease or electrocardiographic alterations is found in 5%-10% of survivors of sudden death, and is known as idiopathic VF (IVF). It is recurrent, it can be self-limiting and manifests managed to finally control the patient’s symptoms, which she tolerated well at a resting heart rate of 63 beats/min and showed no side effects; allowing her to resume her working routine and the care of her children without limitations. An improvement of 47 points in the quality of life evaluation was noted according to the MLWHF questionnaire. In the first 3 months, only 2 episodes of palpitations have occurred, coinciding with a fever and with the use of nasal decongestants, respectively. A new ergometry was performed: clinically negative, without surpassing 80% of the MHR and with a functional capacity of 13.7 MET.

To conclude, Ivabradine could represent an efficient alternative to beta blockers in the treatment of inappropriate sinus tachycardia prior to invasive studies. Prospective and random studies allow for an evaluation of its long term efficiency and safety.

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