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Impact of Discontinuing Beta-Interferon in Patients with Relapsing Remitting Multiple Sclerosis

Mabroka.I.M.Agiela[1]

[1]Benghazi medical center, Benghazi, Libya

Background: Multiple sclerosis is common demyelinating and inflammatory disease of the central nervous system with a presumed autoimmune etiology. Interferons beta 1a and 1b (IFNB-1a and IFNB-1b)have been used for relapsing-remitting multiple sclerosis (RRMS) because of its potential regulatory propertis on T- cell activation and cytokines production.

Objective: During the war in Benghazi-Libya, on February 17,2011, patients with RRMS who were treated with IFNB had to discontinue their therapy due to unavailability of the drug. We evaluated the impact of discontinuing interferon therapy on disease activity in patients with RRMS.

Design & Method: 20 patients were included in this study. The number of relapses, its severity, treatment used and recovery were assessed during interferon therapy and the drug-free period.

Result: The duration of interferon therapy before interruption ranged from 1 to 11 years. 15 out of 20 patients (75%) experienced relapses after discontinuing IFNB. Three patients had more than 1 relapse. Relapses were severe in 12 patients, moderate in severity in 3 patients. 11 patients required admission to the hospital for methylprednisolone therapy (1g intravenous for 3-5 days). The majority of patients (13/15) recovered completely.

Conclusion: IFNB is effective in decreasing the frequency and severity of relapses and should be considered as first line therapy for patients with RRMS.