

Lung Biology in Health and Disease

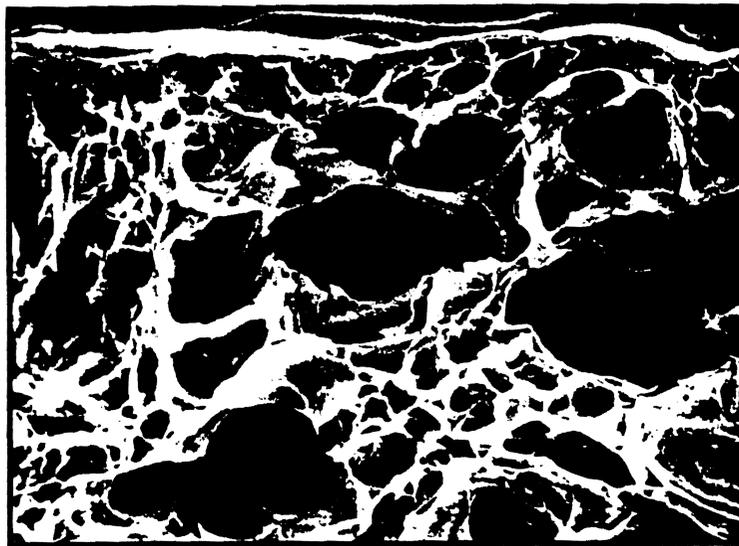
Volume 88

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1451

Alpha 1-Antitrypsin Deficiency

Biology • Pathogenesis •
Clinical Manifestations • Therapy



edited by

Ronald G. Crystal

ALPHA 1-ANTITRYPSIN DEFICIENCY

BIOLOGY • PATHOGENESIS •
CLINICAL MANIFESTATIONS • THERAPY

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α 1AT Deficiency and Liver Transplantation

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I. Introduction

Alpha 1-antitrypsin (α_1 AT) is a 52 kDa alpha 1-glycoprotein that is produced by hepatocytes and secreted into the blood, where it acts as a circulating serine protease inhibitor (1-4). It is a prototypical "suicide" protease inhibitor that combines with its complementary serine protease—be it polymorphonuclear leukocyte serine protease or pancreatic elastase—resulting in its own elimination from the plasma.

α 1AT deficiency is a heritable autosomal recessive metabolic disease that results in the synthesis and secretion of a defective alpha 1-glycoprotein without enzymatic activity Z form that occurs as a consequence of a single amino acid substitution (Gly 342 to Lys 342) (1). It occurs as a result of a single nucleotide substitution in the DNA encoding for the normal M form of the serine protease inhibitor α 1AT.

As noted in earlier chapters, many different alleles for the α_1 AT gene exist. The frequency of various α_1 AT protease inhibitor (PI) phenotypes in almost a thousand whites in Minnesota is shown in Table 1. The most common phenotype is M1, having a frequency of 0.724 (1). The mutant phenotype responsible for α_1 AT deficiency, PiZ, has an estimated frequency of 0.014 (1-5). Thus, the

Table 1 Distribution of PI Phenotypes and Allele Frequencies in Whites Living in Minnesota

| Phenotypes | No. observed | Allele frequencies |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------|
| M1 | 478 | PI*M1 = 0.724 |
| M1M2 | 177 | PI*M2 = 0.137 |
| M1M3 | 121 | PI*M3 = 0.095 |
| M1S | 28 | PI*S = 0.023 |
| M1Z | 18 | PI*Z = 0.014 |
| M1F | 4 | PI*F = 0.003 |
| M1I | 5 | PI*I = 0.003 |
| M1P | 2 | PI*P = 0.001 |
| M2 | 19 | Total = 1.000 |
| M2M3 | 24 | |
| M2S | 4 | |
| M2Z | 4 | |
| M3 | 9 | |
| M3Z | 3 | |
| M3S | 5 | |
| S | 2 | |
| SF | 1 | |
| Total = 904 | | |

frequency of homozygous α_1 AT PiZZ individuals can be calculated to be about 1/5000 individuals. The normal range for α_1 AT levels in serum is 0.85 to 2.13 mg/ml. Individuals who are PiZZ have very low, but not zero, levels of the protein in their serum, with levels typically being below 0.3 mg/ml.

Individuals who are heterozygotes for the Z allele have reduced levels that range from levels half of those of the lower limit of normal to nearly normal levels (Fig. 1) (1,6-16). In contrast, heterozygotes with alleles other than Z often have increased levels of α_1 AT in their serum, as shown in Figure 1 (6-16).

II. α_1 AT Deficiency and Liver Disease

Individuals with α_1 AT deficiency are uniquely susceptible to the development of two disease processes (1-3): panacinar early-onset emphysema and hepatocellular liver disease that presents as either neonatal hepatitis (17-23) in infants or severe protein synthetic liver failure in adults (24-37). The latter presumably occurs as a result of an intrahepatic accumulation of abnormal α_1 AT protein within hepatocytes (38,39).

In a review of the cause of death of adults with α_1 AT, 69% were reported to

Figure 1

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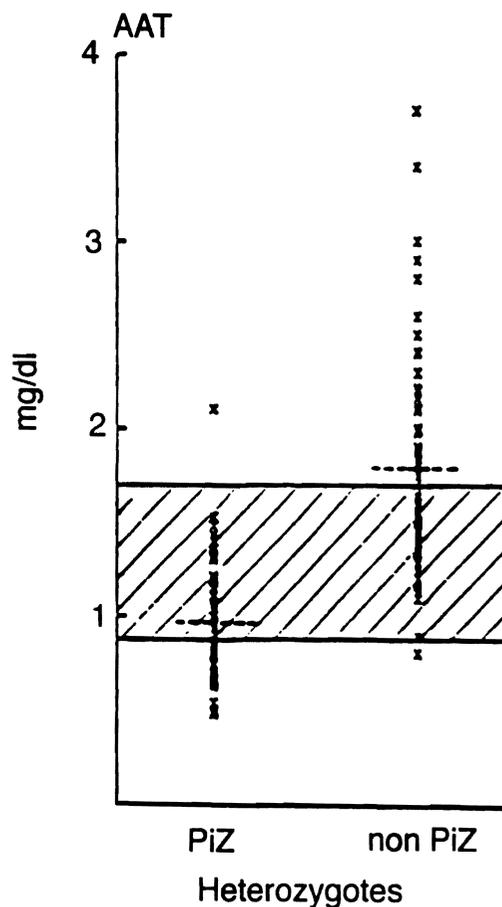


Figure 1 Serum α 1AT levels in heterozygotes with and without a Z allele.

have died as a direct result of either respiratory failure associated with emphysema or a complication of their pulmonary disease (25). A much smaller fraction, 13%, died as result of either hepatic failure or bleeding esophageal varices (Fig. 2) (27,29-32,34,35). As impressive as these figures are, they underestimate the problem of liver disease as a cause of death in individuals with α ₁AT deficiency, as the study from which these data were obtained examined the case of death of only adults with PiZZ α ₁AT deficiency and, as a result, failed to include deaths as a result of α ₁AT deficiency occurring in children (17-23). In the latter cases, essentially all the deaths are a result of liver disease or one of its complications, such as portal hypertension. In our own experience, the number of cases with

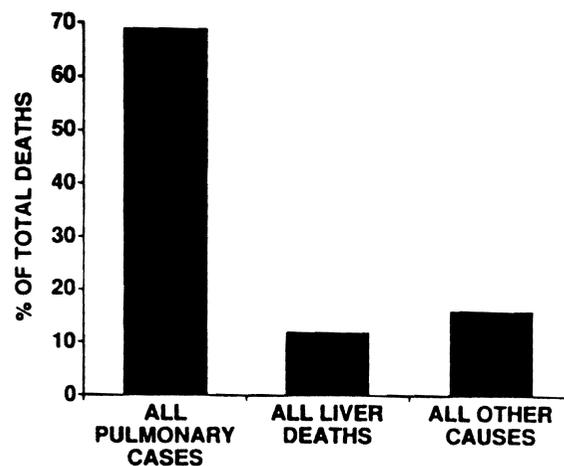


Figure 2 Cause of death in adults with α_1 AT deficiency.

α_1 AT liver disease presenting for liver transplantation in infants or children exceeds the number of cases of adults who present with liver disease due to α_1 AT deficiency. If the deaths that occur in both children and adults with α_1 AT deficiency were determined, it would appear that liver disease accounts for 59% of the total deaths whereas pulmonary disease accounts for 23%. Even these figures underestimate the role of α_1 AT as a cause of lethal liver disease because an increased prevalence of "cryptogenic" cirrhosis associated with α_1 AT heterozygotes for the PiZ allele (particularly MZ) has been reported and the deaths of these individuals would not be included in these totals (7-15,40-42).

Neonatal hepatitis is a common clinical presentation of individuals with α_1 AT deficiency during infancy (17-23,37). Almost 30% of infants with neonatal hepatitis ultimately can be shown to be homozygous for the Z allele. Nearly 6% of the cases of neonatal hepatitis will be heterozygotes (MZ) for the Z allele. Thus, the prevalence of neonatal hepatitis in α_1 AT Z heterozygotes is twice that seen in individuals who have a "normal" MM phenotype. As noted above, adults with cryptogenic cirrhosis have a statistically increased incidence of heterozygosity for the Z allele ($p < 0.001$), which is almost ten-fold greater than the rate of cryptogenic cirrhosis in large, clinical liver-disease populations (Fig. 3) (7-16,40-42). Interestingly, the rates of autoimmune, viral, and alcoholic liver disease in α_1 AT heterozygotes for the Z allele appear to be reduced by about 50%. Only the reduction in the prevalence of alcoholic liver disease, however, achieved a level of statistical significance ($p < 0.01$).

More recently, the relationship between α_1 AT deficiency and liver disease has been shown to be more complex than simply a deficiency of a normal

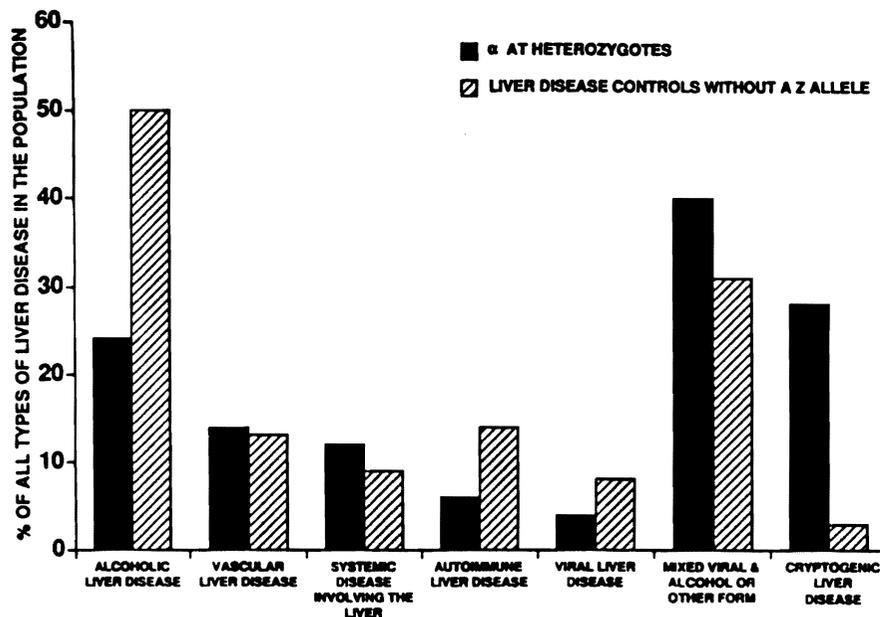


Figure 3 Frequency of Z allele in patients with cryptogenic cirrhosis seen as adults.

circulating secretory serine protease; it may also involve immunological or at least genetic factors, as the rate of α_1 AT deficiency with liver disease is almost threefold higher ($\chi^2 = 7.124$; $p < 0.01$) in individuals who are HLA Dr3-positive (43,44). In contrast, HLA Dr4 appears to be protective, with a halving of the rate of liver disease in individuals who are homozygous for the Z allele ($\chi^2 = 4.010$; $p < 0.05$). The observation that HLA Dr3 occurs at an increased frequency in patients with α_1 AT deficiency and liver disease, however, could not be confirmed in our own series of orthotopic liver-transplant (OLTx) patients (45). Nonetheless, RFIP studies have noted that the association with HLA Dr3 and α_1 AT-deficiency liver disease is associated with the Dw24 and Dw25 subtypes (both $p < 0.05$) and that both Dr3 Dw24 and Dr3 Dw25 occur two and four times more frequently in individuals with α_1 AT deficiency and liver disease than in controls (42,43).

The role of other genetic or environmental factors in the pathogenesis of the liver disease associated with α_1 AT deficiency and the Z allele is either less clear or totally unknown (46). It should be noted, however, that a role for environmental factors may exist, as is the situation with smoking and the association of α_1 AT deficiency and panacinar emphysema (1,2,24,46,47). Individuals who smoke and are homozygous for the Z allele develop clinically evident emphysema a full decade or more earlier than do homozygotes who do not smoke (1-3).

The clinical presentation of children with α_1 AT deficiency is rather consistent, with greater than 75% presenting with neonatal hepatitis (jaundice) and smaller numbers presenting with either asymptomatic hepatosplenomegaly or hematemesis (Fig. 4) (17-23). In the vast majority of cases with neonatal hepatitis, the jaundice resolves within 8 months. A minority (<20%) die in the first year of life, usually in the seventh or eighth month of life. Most, however, do not die but live to develop liver disease that requires transplantation as either an older child or an adult. Table 2 shows the differential diagnosis of α_1 AT disease in children segmented into those who present initially with evidence for liver disease as infants (<1 year of age) and those who are more than 1 year old at the time of initial presentation. In most cases, after the initial period of neonatal hepatitis characterized by cholestasis, the disease progresses as does any other hepatocellular disease, with the development of portal hypertension and protein synthetic defects that characterize the disease process. Six clinical findings are used to identify children with α_1 AT deficiency who have a poor prognosis: the presence of hepatomegaly, a palpably hard liver, failure to thrive, clubbing of fingers, and two or more overt signs of portal hypertension (ascites and varices). Typically, the disease in children follows a characteristic histopathological progression from

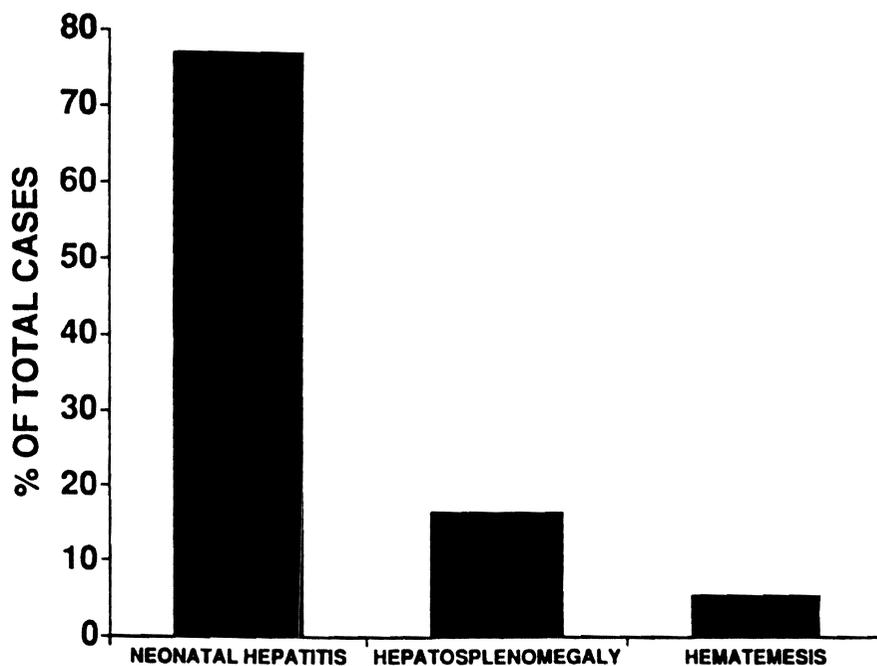


Figure 4 Frequency of various types of clinical presentations of children with α_1 AT deficiency.

Table 2 Differential Diagnosis of α 1AT-Deficiency Liver Disease

| Neonates to 1 year | >1 year |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Neonatal hepatitis | Cystic fibrosis |
| TORCH ^a | Autoimmune chronic active hepatitis |
| Blood-group incompatibility | Wilson's disease |
| Cystic fibrosis | Microcytic liver disease |
| Galactosemia | Congenital hepatic fibrosis |
| Tyrosinemia | Chronic viral hepatitis |

^aTORCH = toxoplasmosis, rubella, cytomegalovirus hepatitis.

the newborn period through 2 years of age, when cirrhosis is usually present (Table 3). Signs and symptoms of portal hypertension typically occur after age 2 and lead to a need for transplantation or to death by age 8 ± 0.3 years (range 8 months to 13 years) (Fig. 4).

The situation is quite similar in adults, with most cases either giving a history of neonatal jaundice or silently developing cirrhosis that presents clinically when a complication of the cirrhosis becomes evident, typically, a problem related to portal hypertension such as ascites, variceal bleeding, or hepatic encephalopathy (24–37).

III. Liver Transplantation

Table 4 shows the frequency of the dominant clinical features of patients with α ₁AT deficiency at a time point immediately prior to OLTx. Table 5 shows the age distribution of cases with α ₁AT deficiency who have received a liver transplant in Pittsburgh. Table 6 shows the percentage of the total cases on an annual basis who were transplanted in Pittsburgh for α ₁AT deficiency. As is evident from Table 5, two peaks in age at time of OLTx occur: the first at ages 2–11 years and the second between 18 and 59 years. Table 6 shows that the fraction of total transplant cases

Table 3 Hepatic Histology in Children with α 1AT Deficiency Liver Disease: Effect of Age

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Giant cell hepatitis | 3 months or less |
| Hepatitis | 3 months to 3 years |
| Portal fibrosis | 4 months to 18 years |
| Cirrhosis | 6 months to 18 months |

Table 4 Dominant Clinical Features in Patients with α_1 AT Deficiency Immediately Before Liver Transplantation

| Clinical features | % |
|---------------------|----|
| Ascites | 80 |
| Variceal hemorrhage | 59 |
| Jaundice | 38 |
| Encephalopathy | 10 |

with α_1 AT deficiency has remained rather stable through the years, ranging from 4 to 9%, with minor variations above this figure.

The rate of graft and patient survival following liver transplantation for all cases with α_1 AT deficiency is 68% and 76%, respectively, through 5 years (Figure 5A). The rate of graft and patient survival for children and adults with α_1 AT deficiency through 5 years is shown in Figure 5B. Little difference in graft survival is evident, but patient survival through 5 years is clearly better for children (81%) than it is for adults (71%). The vast majority of cases (81.3%) require only one graft; 13.5% require a second graft and 5.2% require a third graft.

As for the technical details of the transplant operation, because most cases with α_1 AT deficiency are neither very young (<1 year of age) nor very old (>65 years of age), little or no surgical difficulty is experienced as a result of the required vascular or biliary-tract reconstructions. The major problem during the operative procedure is a result of the portal hypertension and coagulopathy that characterize the disease. In adults, this problem is resolved in large measure as a result of the use of the portal systemic bypass developed by Denmark et al. (49) and used initially by Shaw et al. (50). In children, the bypass is frequently not used

Table 5 Age Distribution of α_1 AT-Deficient Patients at Time of Liver Transplantation

| | <i>n</i> | % |
|------------------------|----------|------|
| Infant (under 2 years) | 5 | 5.2 |
| Child (2-11) | 40 | 41.7 |
| Adolescent (12-17) | 4 | 4.2 |
| Adult (18-59) | 39 | 40.6 |
| Senior (over 60) | 8 | 8.3 |

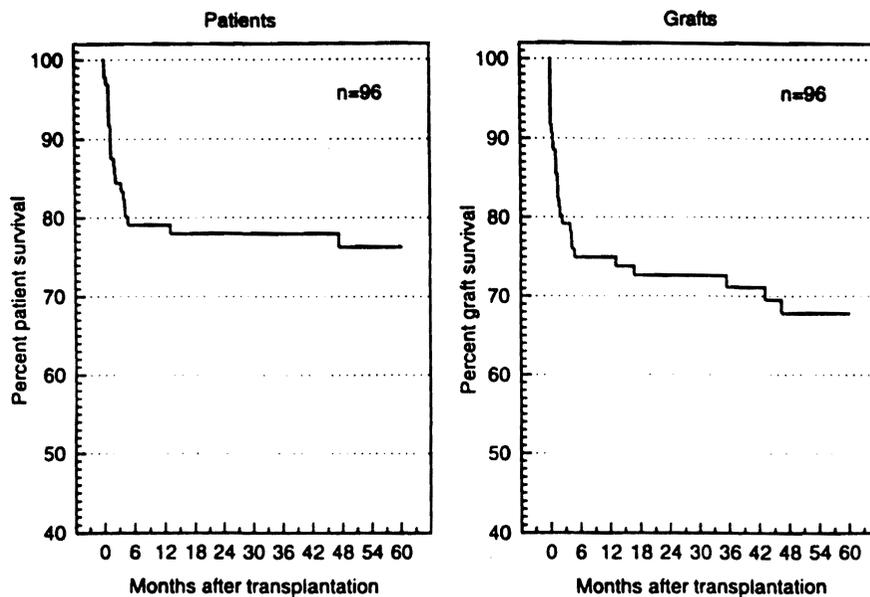
Table 6 Number of Cases Transplanted for α_1 AT Deficiency and the Years in Which the Transplant Procedure was Performed

| | <i>n</i> | % |
|-------|----------|--------|
| 1981 | 6 | 6.3 |
| 1982 | 4 | 4.2 |
| 1983 | 7 | 7.3 |
| 1984 | 9 | 9.4 |
| 1985 | 9 | 9.4 |
| 1986 | 15 | 15.6 |
| 1987 | 8 | 8.3 |
| 1988 | 12 | 12.5 |
| 1989 | 8 | 8.3 |
| 1990 | 13 | 13.5 |
| 1991 | 5 | 5.2 |
| Total | 96 | 100.0% |

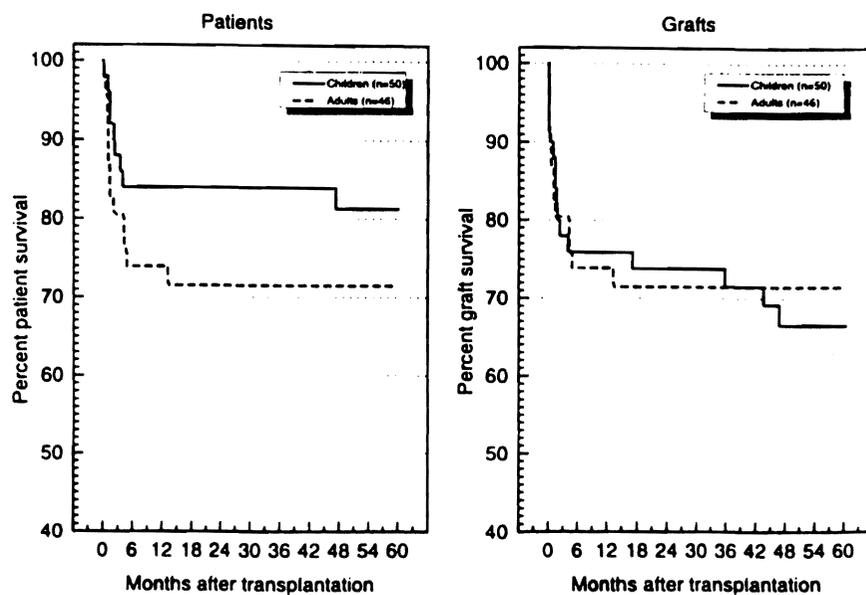
and bleeding can at times be a difficult management problem during the initial parts of the transplant operation.

Following transplantation, the α_1 AT phenotype of the serine protease present in blood becomes that of the organ donor and the serum level returns to the normal range (51–53). As a result, not only is liver function returned to normal with OLTx but also the hepatic disease is cured (51–53). Moreover, because of the normal serum levels, most likely either the pulmonary disease is stabilized or its rate of progression is markedly slowed. This does not occur with portal caval shunting, the only other surgical procedure shown to have benefit in children with this disease (54,55). A major question that remains to be resolved is whether the act of liver replacement also cures or at least halts the progression of the pulmonary disease that occurs as a consequence of α_1 AT deficiency. Studies to examine the serine antiprotease activity, α_1 AT levels, and phenotype in alveolar lavage specimens in long-term survivors of OLTx for α_1 AT deficiency are currently in progress in Pittsburgh. Similarly, studies characterizing the presence or absence—and, if present, the severity—of the pulmonary disease in liver recipients following successful OLTx for α_1 AT are currently in progress.

With the recent demonstration that donor lymphodendritic cell seeding from liver allografts occurs following successful OLTx (56,57), it has become understandable why liver allograft recipients transplanted for metabolic diseases (both



(a)



(b)

Figure 5 Graft and patient survival of (a) all individuals transplanted for α 1AT deficiency at the University of Pittsburgh and (b) for the same cases divided into children and adults.

hepatically based and nonhepatically based) such as type 4 glycogen storage disease (57), type II hyperlipoproteinemia (58), Wilson's disease (59), Wolman's disease (60), Nieman-Pick disease (61), Gaucher's disease (unpublished observations), and seabluish histiocyte syndrome (unpublished observations) have experienced benefits well beyond what was anticipated from liver transplantation. Because the lungs are natural repositories of dendritic cells, it is to be expected that donor-specific α 1AT-positive dendritic cells would be found in the bronchi and alveolar walls of liver allograft recipients who were α 1AT-deficient prior to OLTx. The presence of these cells locally in the lungs following OLTx as well as the fact that normal levels of α 1AT are achieved in the serum of patients transplanted for α 1AT deficiency would be expected to either slow or, more likely, halt the progression of any α 1AT deficiency-dependent pulmonary disease following successful OLTx.

IV. Conclusion

Based on these recent observations (56,57), the role that whole-organ transplantation plays in the management of metabolic disease in general may need to be re-evaluated. It may well be that all such procedures, regardless of the organ being transplanted, result in a gain of metabolic function determined by the content of lymphodendritic cells that migrate from the donor organ throughout the body of the recipient (56,57). The concept that a kidney, spleen, liver, or other organ could bring a systemic supply of a missing lysosomal enzyme has been suggested before (62-64) but was abandoned because of the lack of a rationale and the inability to demonstrate benefit.

Even if the abnormality of α 1AT deficiency in the lungs were not cured as a result of liver transplantation, patient survival and quality of life would be greatly enhanced. It appears more likely, however, that because the level of α 1AT is either normal or greatly enhanced as a result of OLTx, the lung disease is likely to be stabilized or at least its rate of progression markedly reduced following successful OLTx. One might anticipate further that, since the liver disease is cured, the risk for the development of a hepatocellular carcinoma would decline dramatically (8,65-71). Because individuals with α 1AT deficiency are not at increased risk for a biliary cancer prior to liver transplantation, following transplantation the risk for this condition should not be altered (28).

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