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Advances in migraine treatment - a review

Postępy w leczeniu migreny - przegląd literatury

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Abstract

Introduction

Migraine is a heavily debilitating disease that ranks second place in Global Burden Disease. It is estimated that around 1 billion of people suffer from it. It also has a significant negative impact on health-related quality of life (HRQoL) of patients and can affect their social, occupational, academic and familial life. Thus, it is crucial that all of the patients receive an effective treatment.

Objectives

This article aims to review the most recent advances in treatment of migraine.

Methods

A Literature review of articles published in Pubmed between 2000 and 2024 using the following words ‘migraine’, ‘treatment advances’, ‘CGRP receptor antagonists’, ‘serotonin receptor agonists’, ‘lasmiditan’, ‘zavegepant’, ‘rimegepant’.

Results

Literature search provides several concepts of advances in migraine treatment. Apart from behavioral treatment, new drugs targeting calcitonin gene related receptors (CGRP) and serotonin receptors agonists are emerging.

Conclusion

Migraine is a debilitating disease which significantly reduces health related quality of life in patients. New drugs targeting calcitonin gene related receptors (CGRP) and serotonin receptors agonists give a chance for more effective and tailored treatment.

Keywords: migraine, treatment advances, CGRP receptor antagonists, serotonin receptor agonists, lasmiditan, zavegepant, rimegepant

Introduction

Migraine is a type of primary headache that involves recurrent attacks of moderate to severe throbbing and pulsating pain on one side of the head. According to the last Global Burden Disease, it is a second reason for disability and first among young women (Steiner et al. 2020). It is estimated that around 1 billion of people suffer from migraine with around 18% of women and 6% of men being affected (Ashina et al. 2021; Aguilar-Shea, Membrilla Md, and Diaz-de-Teran 2022). Children, adolescents and elderly have relatively low prevalence of migraines, while the highest prevalence is noted among people aged 35-39 (GBD 2016 Headache Collaborators 2018; R. B. Lipton et al. 2007). While chronic migraine, which is described as having headache on at least 15 days per month, with eight of these having migraine symptoms for at least three months, occurs in 1-2% of global population, 2,5% of people suffering from episodic migraine are said to develop chronic migraine (Burch, Buse, and Lipton 2019). Migraine impacts patients' lives during the symptomatic phase and between attacks. The symptoms include head pain, exacerbation by movement or activity, nausea, vomiting, and sensitivity to environmental stimuli (Peres et al. 2017). That is why, it can affect patients' functioning on multiple levels such as occupational, academic, social, familial, and personal settings (Leonardi et al. 2005). A recent review reports that migraine has a significant negative impact on health-related quality of life (Abu Bakar et al. 2016).

Psychological, behavioral interventions as well as treatment can lead to improvement of health-related quality of life in patients with migraine. Thus, it is crucial that all of the patients receive a proper treatment. This paper aims to review the general concept, pathomechanism and the most recent pharmacological treatment options for migraine.

Definition of migraine

Migraine is a type of headache characterized by recurrent attacks of moderate to severe throbbing and pulsating pain on one side of the head with additional neurological and systemic symptoms. The most common symptoms include photophobia, phonophobia, cutaneous allodynia and gastrointestinal symptoms such as nausea and emesis ('Headache Classification Committee of the International Headache Society (IHS) The International Classification of Headache Disorders, 3rd Edition' 2018a; Dodick 2018).

Moreover, patients can experience other neurological symptoms such as vertigo, dizziness, tinnitus and cognitive impairment. The attacks usually last 4-72 and can be divided into 4 overlapping stages (Dodick 2018). The first stage is Prodrome, a stage which can occur one or two days before the attack. It is characterized by yawning, mood changes, difficulty concentrating, neck stiffness, fatigue, thirst and elevated frequency of micturition (Maniyar et al. 2015). The next phase is Aura, which is present in approximately one third of the patients. Visual aura is the most common type (90%) followed by sensory (30-54%) and language aura (31%) (Kissoon and Cutrer 2017). The next stage is the headache. Usually, it increases progressively, reaching its maximum in few hours and then decreases steadily. It is aggravated by head movement and disrupts daily activities. Nausea, vomiting, aversion to touch (allodynia), light (photophobia), sound(phonophobia), and smell (osmophobia) are common accompanying symptoms (Dodick 2018). The last stage is a Postdrome defined as tiredness, drowsiness, difficulty in concentrating and hypersensitivity to noise. This symptoms tend to be more intense and prolonged if the actual headache gets greater (Bose, Karsan, and Goadsby 2018).

Pathomechanism of migraine

The theory behind migraine mechanism is the neurovascular hypothesis (Bigal et al. 2009; Nosedá and Burstein 2013). It states that migraine pain comes from the

trigeminovascular system, which transmits pain signals from the meningeal blood vessels to higher centers of the central nervous system (Golden L. Peters 2019). This system innervates structures such as: the eye, dura mater, large cerebral and pial blood vessels, and the dural venous sinuses (Burstein, Nosedá, and Borsook 2015). These structures are innervated by a plexus of largely unmyelinated fibers, these fibers come from the ophthalmic division of the trigeminal nerve and the upper cervical spinal roots. These peripheral nerves then converge and synapse on second-order neurons in the trigeminal cervical complex (Bartsch and Goadsby 2003). This central convergence is a good explanation on the typical regions involved in migraine namely: the eye, periorbital region, the frontal and temporal head regions. The signal from the second-order neuron then goes to the higher portions of central nervous system such as brainstem, thalamus, basal ganglia and cortex, where it is processed as pain signal (Burstein, Nosedá, and Borsook 2015). The signal transmission from trigeminal system to second-order neurons is mediated by several neurotransmitters, including calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP), glutamate, nitric oxide and substance P. These vasoactive neuropeptides cause vasodilation and dural plasma extravasation, leading to neurogenic inflammation. Moreover, CGRP leads to mast-cell degranulation, which can then activate vascular and meningeal nociceptors cause pain (Dodick 2018; Goadsby et al. 2017). All these pain impulses are then transmitted through brainstem, basal ganglia to higher cortical regions and are detected as pain signals (Dodick 2018; Golden L. Peters 2019).

Symptoms including aversion to touch, light, sound and smell can also be explained by physiology of trigeminal system. Auditory, visual, and olfactory cortical areas receive sensory input from this system thus the characteristic symptoms (Nosedá et al. 2011).

The pathophysiology of chronic migraines relies on similar mechanism, but in a slightly different way. Activated meningeal nociceptors can become sensitized, meaning the response threshold is lower and magnitude of response increases itself. That causes a pain response to a stimuli that in physiological settings would not cause pain (Dodick 2018). Patients suffering from chronic migraines have this central sensitisation present between full-blown attacks, which could explain low-grade headache, allodynia and other symptoms characteristic for the chronic type. Moreover, patients with chronic migraines in the interictal periods have an increased CGRP serum concentration, which goes along with CGRP-related mechanisms (Cernuda-Morollón et al. 2013).

Treatment of migraines

Pharmacological treatment of migraines focuses on addressing acute headache and prophylaxis (Zobdeh et al. 2021). What is more, non-drugs therapies have shown to have a good impact on patients' well-being. These therapies include: avoiding trigger factors, behavioural treatments, relaxation techniques and cognitive behavioural therapy. Thus, such treatment options can prove viable for patients who experience medication-overuse headache, those who express a preference for non-drug treatments, identify life stress as a trigger factor or pregnant and lactating women (Seng and Holroyd 2014; Nicholson et al. 2011; Penzien et al. 2005). Also, research suggest that aerobic exercise might reduce attack frequency to a comparable degree as medication (Varkey et al. 2011).

Prophylaxis- preventative treatment is used in cases such as reducing frequency, severity and duration of the attacks, patients with more than 6 attacks per month, recurring migraines producing disability, serious adverse reactions and ineffective or contraindications for acute therapies (S. D. Silberstein et al. 2012; Loder and Rizzoli 2018; Rizzoli 2014). Moreover, patients with rare migraines subtypes: hemiplegic migraine, migraine with brainstem aura, frequent, prolonged, or uncomfortable aura symptoms or migrainous infarction should also consider preventative treatment (Dodick 2018). Medication that can be used to treat migraine prevention include drugs from different groups like β blockers (propranolol), calcium channel blockers and anticonvulsants (flunarizine , valproic acid, topiramate) or antidepressants (amitriptyline). Newer drugs also used for prophylaxis are calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) antagonists like Rimegepant or humanized monoclonal antibodies directed against human CGRP e.g. Fremanezumab and Erenumab (Dodick 2018; Stephen D. Silberstein et al. 2017).

Treatment for acute headache focuses on drug usage and behavioral therapy. Some general rules that improve patients outcomes are: administering acute medication early while the pain is mild and choosing the proper dose and route of administration. For example, non-oral medication like nasal sprays or injections, can prove to be useful in patients experiencing vomiting in the early phases or the ones' who pain progresses rapidly e.g. within 30 minutes (Dodick 2005). Moreover, patients who do not receive a fast pain relief or have another headache within 24-48 hours might benefit from combining acute drugs with different action mechanisms (Becker 2015). Another general rule concerns educating patients experiencing frequent headaches about medication-overuse headache, so that they take simple analgesics like non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID), paracetamol less than 15 days per month,

and triptans, ergots, or combination analgesics less than 10 days per month ('Headache Classification Committee of the International Headache Society (IHS) The International Classification of Headache Disorders, 3rd Edition' 2018b; Diener et al. 2012). As mentioned, acute headache is treated with analgesics like: paracetamol, salicylic acid (NSAID), ergots, triptans or their combination (Ailani 2021).

Advanced medications

New treatment options have appeared for treating acute phase of migraines. They include medication from two groups CGRP receptor antagonists and serotonin (5-HT) 1F receptor agonists (Zobdeh et al. 2021).

Zavegepant is a CGRP receptor antagonist that is registered under the name Zavzpret. Its administration route is a nasal spray which provides option for patients experiencing nausea and vomiting, those who do not tolerate oral medications or the drugs itself are ineffective or slow-acting (Khan et al. 2023). The mechanism of this drug targets pain pathways. After activating the trigeminovascular system, pain-inducing neuropeptides are released. That causes dilatating extracranial vessels, which leads to the throbbing sensation of a migraine headache (Riesco et al. 2020). Vasodilation is triggered by neuropeptides e.g. calcitonin gene related peptide (CGRP) (Khan et al. 2023). Recent double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled, multicentre phase 3 trial, conducted at 90 academic medical centres has found that more participants in the zavegepant group has reported pain relief than the placebo group (Richard B. Lipton et al. 2023). Another randomized, placebo-controlled, dose-ranging, phase 2/3 clinical trial was conducted to determine the safety and efficacy of different doses of zavegepant. The doses used in the trial were 5mg, 10mg, 20mg and the placebo group. As for the primary outcome measures of efficacy, 19.6% of the participants in the 5 mg group, 22.5% in 10 mg, 23.1% in 20 mg and 15.5% in the placebo group reported freedom from pain two hours post dose (Croop et al. 2022).

Rimegepant is another CGRP receptor antagonist administered orally and used for acute treatment. It uses similar mechanism like zavegepant, but the administration is oral. It is sold as the orally disintegrating tablet (ODT) formulation, which provides significantly faster absorption than standard tablet formulation. It is contraindicated in patients with end stage renal disease (ESRD) or dialysis as it has not been researched yet (Scott 2020). In a recent multicenter, double-blind, phase 3 trial people were assigned to rimegepant orally at a dose of

75 mg and placebo for the treatment of a single migraine attack. End results found that treatment of a migraine attack with the oral calcitonin gene-related peptide receptor antagonist rimegepant resulted in a higher percentage of patients who were free of pain and free from their most bothersome symptom than placebo (Richard B. Lipton et al. 2019).

Lasmiditan is the first serotonin (5-HT) 1F receptor agonist for acute migraine treatment administered orally. Its' mechanism is based on activating 5-HT_{1F} receptors on presynaptic trigeminal nerve terminals. This inhibits the release of calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) from trigeminal nerve endings and thereby suppresses activation of the trigeminovascular system. What is more, it does not result in vasoconstriction, making lasmiditan a migraine-specific acute treatment option for those with cardiovascular risk factors (Labastida-Ramírez et al. 2020; Parikh 2021). This quality is potentially a great asset of Lasmiditan as most of the drugs e.g. triptans and dihydroergotamine induce vasoconstriction by binding to the serotonin 5-HT_{1B} receptor type on smooth muscle cells in the coronary and cerebral arteries (Ong and De Felice 2018). Thus both of these drugs are not suitable for patients with cardiovascular disease, which gives Lasmiditan an advantage (Mathew and Klein 2019). The clinical trial run in 2018 in phase 3 randomized patients into 3 groups: oral lasmiditan 200 mg, lasmiditan 100 mg, or placebo. All of the patients had more than one cardiovascular risk factors. The end point analysis showed that compared with placebo, more patients dosed with lasmiditan 200 mg were free of headache pain at 2 hours after dosing similar to those dosed with lasmiditan 100 mg (Kuca et al. 2018).

Conclusion

Without a doubt migraine is an extremely debilitating disease, which takes toll on patients. It reduces their health related quality of life and negatively impacts their personal, occupational and social lives. Adequate and effective treatment gives patients opportunity for a better quality of life. Apart from widely used drugs newer medications targeting specific receptor emerge. This gives an opportunity for a more effective medication with less side effects. Further research is needed in order to better establish safety, efficacy and efficiency of the new medications.

Disclosures

Author's contribution:

Conceptualization: KS, AE-L, PK; Methodology: KS, AE-L, PK, AF, AM; Software: not applicable; Check: AS, EK, JG, MG; Formal analysis: KK, AF, KS, AM; Investigation: AS, EK; Resources: not applicable; Data curation: AF, AM, AS, EK; Writing - rough preparation: JG, MG, KK, AE-L; Writing - review and editing: PK, KS, AF, AM ; Visualization: EK, JG; Supervision: MG, KK; Project administration: KS; Receiving Funding: not applicable

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