

ORAL AZITHROMYCIN MAY INDUCE PARTIALLY REVERSIBLE HEARING LOSS IN PATIENTS WITH CHRONIC HEPATITIS. REPORT OF A CASE

Tung-Heng Wang^{1,4}, Chung-Yao Hsu^{2,5}, Chau-Nee Chen², Kuen-Yao Ho^{3,4}, Jhi-Jhu Hwang^{1,4}

Division of Chest Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine¹, Neurology², Otorhinolaryngology³, Kaohsiung Medical University Hospital; Faculty of Medicine⁴, College of Medicine, and Graduate Institute of Behavioral Sciences⁵, College of Health Science, Kaohsiung Medical University, Kaohsiung City, TAIWAN

BACKGROUND/ AIMS: Large dose, intravenous route, and long duration administration of azithromycin, usually employed in the treatment of myco-bacterial lung diseases for immuno-compromised hosts, may place patients at greater risk of ototoxicity. This article reports partially reversible hearing loss, illustrated by serial audiograms, as a result of daily oral dose of 500 mg azithromycin for 3 days for community-acquired pneumonia in a patient with chronic hepatitis.

CASE REPORT: A 54-year-old male food manufacturing engineer, non-smoker, was treated with oral cephadrine (750-mg daily dose) in addition to azithromycin described above after he sought medical aid on December 20, 2005. He had fever, chills, cough with phlegm for 4 days, and a finding on chest X-ray of left lower lobe infiltrates. He was admitted on Christmas morning due to persistent fever and hearing loss at the left ear. Complete hearing loss in the afternoon made oral communication so difficult that he had to communicate through writing. Meningitis, septic emboli, and intracranial and other local auditory lesions were excluded as the cause of hearing loss considering the findings on physical examination, computed tomography, magnetic resonance imaging, and results of blood and cerebrospinal fluid examinations. Hearing deficits involved initially the whole spectrum of auditory frequencies for verbal speech. Recovery was noted at lower frequency range around 7 days after the last dose of azithromycin. Hearing deficits persisted in the high frequency range during the last follow-up on audiogram 3 months later, though the patient did not experience difficulty in speaking (Figure 1).

DISCUSSION/ CONCLUSIONS: Physicians should bear in mind that azithromycin, even given in oral form, may induce hearing loss in patients with chronic hepatitis.

Keywords: azithromycin, oto-toxicity, chronic hepatitis, community-acquired pneumonia,

Figure 1 Serial audiograms show partially reversible hearing loss.

