

HUMAN T CELL PROLIFERATIVE RESPONSES TO
P.vivax ANTIGENS: EVIDENCE OF
IMMUNOSUPPRESSION ON PROLONGED EXPOSURE
TO ENDEMIC MALARIA

Renu Goonewardena*, Richard Carter**, C.P. Gamage*,
Giuseppe Del Giudice***, P.H. David****,
Sarah Howie***** and Kamini N. Mendis*.

* Dept. of Parasitology, Faculty of Medicine,
University of Colombo,

** Dept. of Animal Genetics, University of Edinburgh,

*** WHO, Immunology Research & Training Centre,
University of Geneva,

**** Unite d' Immunoparasitologie, Paris,

***** Dept. of Pathology, University of Edinburgh.

We investigated the peripheral blood mononuclear cell (PBMC) responses from 33 Sri Lankan adults convalescing from acute P.vivax malaria to antigens of P.vivax, an unrelated antigen PPD, and to a mitogen Con-A, by incorporation of tritiated thymidine. The P.vivax antigens used in this study were betagalactosidase fusion proteins of fragments of 2 cloned antigens, PV200 and GAM-1 both being potential vaccine candidates, and a soluble extract of P.vivax asexual erythrocytic stage parasites. The subjects investigated consisted of 1) a group of P.vivax convalescents resident in Kataragama, a malaria region in Southern Sri Lanka, 2) individuals resident in Colombo or its suburbs, regions which are not endemic for malaria, they having contracted the disease on a visit to a malarious region, and 3) non-malarious controls.

The T cell proliferative responses to P.vivax antigens of individuals exposed to endemic malaria transmission were significantly lower than those of individuals who were resident in a malaria non-endemic region ($p < 0.01$) as judged by both the proportion of responders as well as the degree of the response. The responses of these two groups to the mitogen Con-A were identical, indicating that continuous exposure to P.vivax malaria causes suppression of T cell responsiveness to malaria antigens. The proportion of individuals responding to PPD in the 2 groups was not significantly different although the degree of the response to PPD was lower in the 'malaria endemic' group, implying that the immunosuppression of PBMC responses were specific to malarial antigens.

The PBMC responses to both cloned antigens PV200 and GAM-1 were generally poor in all P.vivax convalescent individuals. This could be due to a dearth of T-cell epitopes on the antigen fragments used here, or polymorphism of T-cell epitopes in natural parasite isolates. These findings bear significant implications on the development of a malaria vaccine.