



Hyperparathyroidism

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Primary hyperparathyroidism is a common endocrine disorder of calcium metabolism characterised by hypercalcaemia and elevated or inappropriately normal concentrations of parathyroid hormone. Almost always, primary hyperparathyroidism is due to a benign overgrowth of parathyroid tissue either as a single gland (80% of cases) or as a multiple gland disorder (15–20% of cases). Primary hyperparathyroidism is generally discovered when asymptomatic but the disease always has the potential to become symptomatic, resulting in bone loss and kidney stones. In countries where biochemical screening tests are not common, symptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism tends to predominate. Another variant of primary hyperparathyroidism has been described in which the serum calcium concentration is within normal range but parathyroid hormone is elevated in the absence of any obvious cause. Primary hyperparathyroidism can be cured by removal of the parathyroid gland or glands but identification of patients who are best advised to have surgery requires consideration of the guidelines that are regularly updated. Recommendations for patients who do not undergo parathyroid surgery include monitoring of serum calcium concentrations and bone density.

Introduction

Primary hyperparathyroidism is a common disorder of mineral metabolism that is due to excessive secretion of parathyroid hormone from one or more of the four parathyroid glands. The clinical consequences of abnormally active parathyroid tissue are typically hypercalcaemia and concentrations of parathyroid hormone that are either clearly elevated above the normal range or inappropriately normal in the context of hypercalcaemia.¹ Primary hyperparathyroidism predominantly affects women, with studies reporting a female-to-male ratio of approximately 3–4:1.^{2,3} Although several different clinical presentations of primary hyperparathyroidism are now commonly recognised, this was not always the case. In the 1930s, Albright first described the hypercalcaemic state caused by primary hyperparathyroidism as a disease of bones and stones.⁴ Although the clinical presentation of primary hyperparathyroidism has changed since the years of Albright, the central target organs for potential complications of this disorder continue to be the skeleton and kidneys. The typical diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism is no longer accompanied by overt skeletal and renal involvement. Rather, detection of skeletal or renal involvement requires proactive testing with technologies that were not available in Albright's day. The change in the clinical phenotype of primary hyperparathyroidism has fostered another dilemma—namely, for whom among the large number of individuals with only biochemical abnormalities associated with primary hyperparathyroidism should parathyroid surgery be recommended? The Fourth International Workshop on the Management of Asymptomatic Primary Hyperparathyroidism, held in 2013, addressed this question and other issues.^{5,6}

Clinical presentation

Asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism is the most common presentation in countries, such as the USA, Canada, and Germany, where biochemical screening is routinely implemented. Hypercalcaemia is usually not

more than 0.25 mmol/L above the upper limit of the normal range (2.10–2.55 mmol/L). Overt kidney stone disease occurs in less than 20% of patients with primary hyperparathyroidism and radiologically evident bone disease is even less common.⁷ Conversely, target organ involvement at presentation dominates the clinical landscape of primary hyperparathyroidism in other countries, such as China and India, where biochemical screening is not routine practice.⁸ The major presentations of primary hyperparathyroidism as seen throughout the world are summarised in this Seminar. Other forms of hyperparathyroidism (ie, secondary and tertiary hyperparathyroidism) are described in detail elsewhere.⁹

Symptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism

Osteitis fibrosa cystica is the term given to the pathognomonic skeletal features of primary hyperparathyroidism that are evident by routine skeletal radiograph. The radiological features of osteitis fibrosa cystica include salt-and-pepper degeneration of the skull, tapering of the distal clavicle, subperiosteal resorption of the distal phalanges, bone cysts, and brown tumours. These radiological features can be associated with fractures, skeletal deformities, and bone pain.¹⁰ In this symptomatic

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Search strategy and selection criteria

We searched PubMed between Jan 1, 2008, and Jan 1, 2016, for the terms “primary hyperparathyroidism”, “normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism”, “parathyroid surgery”, “parathyroid localization”, and “primary hyperparathyroidism international”. The time period for this search covers the years before and after the Fourth International Workshop on the Management of Asymptomatic Primary Hyperparathyroidism that was held in 2013. We limited the recovered entries to human patients in English. We also based this Seminar on classic literature from before 2008 that was well known to us.

phenotype of primary hyperparathyroidism, the other major target organ, the kidney, can develop kidney stones, nephrocalcinosis, and reduced renal function.^{11,12} In the clinically overt phenotype of primary hyperparathyroidism, the neuromuscular system can also be involved with proximal muscle weakness.¹³ The gastrointestinal tract might be prone to peptic ulcer disease and pancreatitis.¹⁴ Involvement of the cardiovascular system is typically characterised by hypertension and accelerated atherosclerotic heart disease.¹⁵ Neurocognitive features are also common in symptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism, including anxiety, poor concentrating ability, and cognitive decline.^{16,17}

Asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism

With the advent of multichannel screening, the most common clinical presentation of primary hyperparathyroidism changed from symptomatic disease to its asymptomatic variant. The term asymptomatic is defined in patients with unequivocal primary hyperparathyroidism, established by laboratory testing, who display no overt signs of the disease or target organ manifestations other than hypercalcaemia.¹⁸ The introduction of widespread screening in the USA in the early 1970s resulted in an increase in incidence of primary hyperparathyroidism by four to five times, which could almost entirely be attributed to patients discovered incidentally and who were asymptomatic.¹⁹

Normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism

In the early 2000s, the variability of the clinical presentation of the disease broadened further with reports of patients who appeared to have primary hyperparathyroidism on the basis of persistently elevated parathyroid hormone concentrations but whose serum calcium concentrations were persistently within normal range. Early reports came from referral centres in which parathyroid hormone concentration was routinely measured in cases of suspected metabolic bone disease, even if serum calcium was within normal range.^{20–23} Secondary causes for increased parathyroid hormone concentration (eg, vitamin D deficiency, malabsorption syndromes, renal insufficiency, primary hypercalcaemia, other metabolic bone diseases, lithium, and thiazide diuretics) should be excluded, as these can induce parathyroid hormone stimulation. Some individuals receiving bisphosphonate or denosumab therapies for osteoporosis might also have elevations in parathyroid hormone concentration.²⁴ When these secondary causes are excluded, a diagnosis of normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism can be made. The work of Parfitt, Rao, and Kleerekoper,²⁵ in the early 1990s, predicted the existence of this form of primary hyperparathyroidism and its prevalence figures vary widely, from 0.4% to 11%.^{26,27}

Patients with normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism often initially present for possible

metabolic bone disease, and, probably due to referral bias, show more target organ involvement than patients with asymptomatic hypercalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism, who are typically discovered incidentally.^{20,21} However, when normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism is sought among unselected populations, they too, as expected, are asymptomatic.²⁸ Thus, patients with the normocalcaemic variant of primary hyperparathyroidism, as with hypercalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism, can have either symptomatic or asymptomatic disease.²⁰

Quality of life

The “moans and groans” of primary hyperparathyroidism, first described by Albright,⁴ are also characteristic of hypercalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism. Although patients have no classic manifestations of target organ involvement,¹⁷ excessive fatigue, difficulty concentrating, and intellectual weariness are often reported.²⁹ However, whether in the context of the disease identified incidentally, these symptoms can be causally linked to primary hyperparathyroidism, is unclear.^{16,30–40}

Epidemiology

North America

In the USA and Canada, primary hyperparathyroidism predominantly presents as an asymptomatic disorder.²¹ Overall, the prevalence of primary hyperparathyroidism in the USA was estimated at 0.86% in 2008–09.⁴¹ Consistent with the change in diagnostic strategies, in Southern California the incidence of primary hyperparathyroidism was reported to have tripled between 1995 and 2010.⁴² A 60% increase in the incidence of parathyroid cancer over this 15 year period was also reported in the USA.⁴³ Some differences in incidence between ethnic groups have been reported, with the disease occurring more often in African American populations than in white populations in both men and women.⁴²

Europe

Similar to the epidemiology in North America, primary hyperparathyroidism in Europe most often presents as an asymptomatic disorder. Both in Sweden and Denmark, the incidence of primary hyperparathyroidism appears to be increasing, perhaps because of an increase in the use of screening methods.^{44,45}

Latin America

Precise information about the prevalence and clinical presentation of primary hyperparathyroidism in Latin America is conflicting. One study⁴⁶ from Latin America reported about half of patients with primary hyperparathyroidism were asymptomatic, yet another reported that 44% of patients had kidney stones.⁴⁷ However, a 2013 study⁴⁸ reported that most patients with primary hyperparathyroidism were asymptomatic.

Asia

In Asia, primary hyperparathyroidism is more likely to present with more marked hypercalcaemia and target organ involvement than in other regions of the world.^{49,50} Nevertheless, this classic presentation is also changing. In Beijing, China several decades ago, primary hyperparathyroidism almost always presented as a symptomatic disorder.⁵⁰ More recently, in Shanghai and Hong Kong the presentation of asymptomatic disease has increased.^{51–53} In other Asian countries (India, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Thailand) primary hyperparathyroidism continues to present as a symptomatic disorder.^{49,54–58} Thus, prevalence of primary hyperparathyroidism appears to be associated with presentation—ie, in countries where prevalence is higher, primary hyperparathyroidism tends to be more asymptomatic.

Pathophysiology

The secretion and synthesis of parathyroid hormone is controlled by the ambient circulating ionised calcium concentration. Under normal conditions, an increase in circulating ionised calcium concentration, which might not be detected by biochemical methods, will instantly suppress parathyroid hormone secretion. Similarly, an imperceptible reduction in serum calcium concentration will immediately stimulate parathyroid hormone secretion. This inverse sigmoidal association between parathyroid hormone and serum calcium concentration is regulated by the calcium-sensing receptor.⁵⁹ The other principal regulator of parathyroid hormone secretion is 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D concentration, which is also inversely associated with parathyroid hormone concentration.⁶⁰ Although not considered to be as important as calcium or 1,25-dihydroxyvitamin D, phosphate concentration does bear some association with parathyroid hormone secretion, probably as an indirect factor by influencing calcium concentration.⁶¹ Furthermore, a potential suppressive effect of fibroblast growth factor 23 on parathyroid hormone secretion has been described.⁶²

Parathyroid hormone is secreted in three distinct ways: tonic secretion, circadian dynamics (with the highest amount secreted in the morning and lowest in the evening), and a pulsatility that appears to be stochastic (occurring unpredictably, ten or more times a day). Most parathyroid hormone is secreted continuously.^{63,64} In bone, parathyroid hormone acts on osteoblasts, osteocytes, and osteoclasts.⁶⁵ In the kidney, the effects of parathyroid hormone are targeted to enhance tubular calcium reabsorption, a calcium-conserving property, and enhance phosphate excretion, a phosphaturic property. The logic of this physiology would argue that patients with primary hyperparathyroidism should not have hypercalciuria. Although this argument is logical, and indeed patients with non-parathyroid hormone-dependent hypercalcaemia have greater urinary calcium

excretion for a given level of hypercalcaemia than patients with parathyroid hormone-dependent hypercalcaemia, hypercalciuria is also common in primary hyperparathyroidism. Hypercalciuria caused by primary hyperparathyroidism is due to an increased filtered load of calcium that exceeds the conserving capability of the kidney.⁶¹ In the context of abnormal parathyroid activity, individual parathyroid cells overproduce parathyroid hormone because they have lost their great sensitivity to the serum calcium concentration (the parathyroid adenoma), or in the context of chronic secondary stimulation or germline or somatic mutations that are normally sensitive to serum calcium concentration, a greater number of parathyroid cells are present (parathyroid gland hyperplasia).

Causes and risk factors

Primary hyperparathyroidism is most commonly due to a single benign parathyroid adenoma (approximately 80% of patients), with multiglandular disease seen in approximately 15–20% of patients.⁶⁶ Multiglandular disease usually takes the form of four-gland parathyroid hyperplasia, but multiple parathyroid adenomas have also been described. Parathyroid cancer is rare and accounts for well under 1% of all cases of primary hyperparathyroidism.⁹ In most patients with primary hyperparathyroidism, the disease is sporadic, without a personal or family history of primary hyperparathyroidism or other endocrinopathies.^{67,68} Risk factors associated with the development of primary hyperparathyroidism include external radiation in childhood^{69,70} and exposure to lithium⁷¹ and thiazide diuretics.⁷² The genetic syndromes associated with primary hyperparathyroidism are considered major risk factors and include multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1, 2A, and 4, hyperparathyroidism-jaw tumour syndrome, familial isolated primary hyperparathyroidism, familial hypocalcaemic hypercalcaemia, and neonatal severe hyperparathyroidism.^{68,73,74}

Diagnosis

The albumin-corrected serum calcium concentration is usually elevated. To correct the calcium concentration for serum albumin, the measured serum calcium concentration is adjusted upward by 0.2 mmol/L for every 10 g/L by which the serum albumin is below 40 g/L. Ionised serum calcium concentration can be used for the measurement of serum calcium in centres that are equipped for accurate measurement with an instrument that has a proper ion-sensing electrode, which obviates the need for correction for albumin. Most centres, however, rely on the albumin-corrected total calcium concentration for the measurement of serum calcium. The serum phosphorus concentration is typically in the lower limit of the normal range, which is between 0.97 and 1.13 mmol/L. With clinically useful assays for parathyroid hormone, now available for several decades, the diagnosis of primary

hyperparathyroidism is straightforward. An elevated or inappropriately normal parathyroid hormone concentration essentially establishes the diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism.¹ The discussion about how low the concentration of parathyroid hormone can be while remaining consistent with the diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism is controversial.² Certainly, however, a parathyroid hormone concentration of 20 ng/L or higher in a hypercalcaemic setting is inappropriate and is consistent with a diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism.²

Familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia can be a difficult issue in the differential diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism. Familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia is an autosomal dominant disorder of the calcium-sensing receptor gene, in which the calcium-to-creatinine clearance ratio is very low (ie, <0.01). A family history of familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia might be present and is a very helpful clue to the diagnosis.^{75,76} In patients from families in which parathyroid surgery has been unsuccessful, the possibility of familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia becomes more probable. Familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia is rarely complicated by stone and bone disease or marked hypercalcaemia. The penetrance of familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia is so high that almost all individuals who have the genetic mutation will become hypercalcaemic before the age of 30 years. Screening for familial hypocalciuric hypercalcaemia is thus focused on young individuals who present with hypercalcaemia and a very low clearance ratio of calcium-to-creatinine, and have a family history of hypercalcaemia or unsuccessful parathyroid surgery, or both.

Other genetic disorders that should be considered in the differential diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism include multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 or 2. Screening is justified in settings of familial glandular secretory syndromes that involve the pituitary glands and pancreas (ie, multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1), or the thyroid or adrenal glands, or both (ie, multiple endocrine neoplasia type 2). If the patient also has a history suggestive of multiple endocrine neoplasia type 1 or 2, screening for these familial syndromes is important.

The clinical presentation of parathyroid cancer is very different from the presentation of typical primary hyperparathyroidism. Patients with parathyroid cancer tend to be younger by about a decade—namely, between 40 and 50 years—and the prevalence is roughly the same in women and men.⁷⁷ Serum calcium and parathyroid hormone concentrations are usually much higher than in typical primary hyperparathyroidism. Overt stone and bone disease are also common. In parathyroid surgery, the parathyroid gland can be adherent to adjacent structures and difficult to remove. Furthermore, local spread of parathyroid cancer can occur.⁷⁸ Histologically, parathyroid cancer is suspected when mitotic figures are abundant, cellular atypia is seen, and invasion of adjacent tissue including blood vessels is present.^{9,79}

Evaluation

Biochemical and imaging technology are used to determine whether, and the extent to which, primary hyperparathyroidism has involved the bone and kidney. Blood is obtained to analyse concentrations of serum calcium, phosphorus, parathyroid hormone, 25-hydroxyvitamin D, and bone turnover markers (typically one bone formation and one bone resorption index); a 24-h urine test for calcium and creatinine is also done.^{1,42}

Skeletal imaging depends on several modalities, the most common being dual energy x-ray absorptiometry (DXA). The classic pattern of skeletal involvement shown in DXA is greatest reduction at the distal third of the radius, a cortical site, followed by lesser degrees of skeletal involvement at the hip and lumbar spine regions endowed with a greater proportion of trabecular bone.^{6,80} Although this pattern of skeletal involvement is consistent with the idea that parathyroid hormone is more catabolic at cortical sites, abnormalities can also be readily seen in trabecular bone by the trabecular bone score and high resolution peripheral quantitative tomography.^{81–88} The skeletal abnormalities shown with these imaging technologies are consistent with epidemiological studies that show an overall increase in fracture incidence in primary hyperparathyroidism.^{89,90} Vertebral fracture assessment, which is an interpretive adaptation of the lumbar spine DXA image, has helped to confirm that the trabecular skeleton is also at risk of fracture in primary hyperparathyroidism. These observations have led to the recommendation that skeletal evaluation in patients with primary hyperparathyroidism should go beyond three-site DXA testing and include vertebral fracture assessment, trabecular bone score, or radiography of the vertebral spine.⁵

Imaging of the kidneys shows the potential effects of primary hyperparathyroidism on its target organ. Although nephrolithiasis has declined as a clinical feature of primary hyperparathyroidism,⁶ the incidence of nephrolithiasis and nephrocalcinosis is substantially higher when the kidneys are imaged by radiography, CT, or ultrasound.^{90–92} This observation has led to guidance that patients with primary hyperparathyroidism should undergo a more complete analysis for biochemical stone risk constituents as well as renal imaging.¹²

Among the more complex issues related to the evaluation of primary hyperparathyroidism are the non-traditional aspects of neurocognitive and cardiovascular function. However, the fact that these so-called non-traditional features of primary hyperparathyroidism were regularly recognised when the disease presented in a classic symptomatic form, is important to recall. Thus, clear potential exists for neurocognitive and cardiovascular features to show involvement in primary hyperparathyroidism. Nevertheless, to establish unequivocally that neurocognitive and cardiovascular

involvement can be reproducibly shown and is reversible after successful parathyroidectomy, has been very difficult.^{17,93}

Natural history

Hypercalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism

The 15-year observational study by Rubin and colleagues⁹⁴ indicates that the natural history of asymptomatic hypercalcaemia due to primary hyperparathyroidism can be associated with biochemical and densitometric stability. Many patients who were not candidates for parathyroid surgery at the time of evaluation continued to be stable over the study period. However, a substantial number of patients developed criteria for parathyroid surgery with a tendency for worsening hypercalcaemia and reduced hip and distal radial bone density. These features of increased skeletal involvement became more evident during years 8 and 15 of this observational study.^{94,95}

Normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism

The natural history of normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism is much less certain than the hypercalcaemic form of the disease. Normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism progression was observed by Lowe and colleagues²¹ in 40% of patients. However, other studies^{26,96} have not confirmed these observations.

Management

Acute management

Although primary hyperparathyroidism is considered to be a disorder of mild hypercalcaemia, a presentation of primary hyperparathyroidism with markedly high serum calcium concentrations exists that can be life-threatening. Most often these patients have a history, before their presentation with life-threatening hypercalcaemia, of only mildly elevated serum calcium concentration. Occasionally, patients with life-threatening primary hyperparathyroidism present de novo without any antecedent history of hypercalcaemia. Although the initial consideration of health-care professionals when presented with this medical emergency might be malignancy, the fact that some of the highest reported values of serum calcium concentrations are due to uncontrolled primary hyperparathyroidism is important to consider. If malignancy is suspected, the serum concentration of parathyroid hormone-related protein can indicate acute hypercalcaemia caused by primary hyperparathyroidism.^{97,98} Management of acute hypercalcaemia due to primary hyperparathyroidism is not different from management of other causes of life-threatening hypercalcaemia.⁹⁷ Hydration is an important treatment, followed by furosemide administration if the clinical situation permits.⁹ The use of antiresorptive drugs, such as calcitonin or an intravenous bisphosphonate (pamidronate or zoledronic acid), or both, can be an important adjunct to hydration. Steroids are typically not helpful in the management of acute hypercalcaemia caused by primary

hyperparathyroidism, but can be effective in multiple myeloma or hypercalcaemia due to exogenous or endogenous vitamin D production. Cinacalcet (a calcimimetic) would not be used in the setting of acute hypercalcaemia because it requires oral administration and patients with acute hypercalcaemia usually have upper gastrointestinal tract symptoms (nausea and vomiting). Rarely, parathyroidectomy, an acute, life-saving measure, is needed if the diagnosis of primary hyperparathyroidism is secure and all alternative treatments have been exhausted.^{98,99}

Standard management and guidelines

Parathyroid surgery in patients with primary hyperparathyroidism, whose parathyroid adenoma has been localised by preoperative imaging, is very straightforward and usually results in cure of the disease.^{100,101} Biochemical features of the disease and other outcome measures such as risk of kidney stones, bone mineral density, and risk of fractures, are improved after surgery.^{34–36,94,102–104} No controversy exists about patients with symptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism; these patients should undergo parathyroid surgery unless there are extenuating circumstances medically or otherwise that contraindicate this general recommendation.^{5,105} Beneficial effects of surgery have also been reported for patients with normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism.^{106,107}

What is controversial and has been the focus of four international workshops, is the role of surgery in the management of asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism.^{5,105,108} A patient with asymptomatic disease might have some signs of target organ disease. Thus, a thorough evaluation is required for all patients with asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism to establish whether or not skeletal or renal involvement is present and, thus, would meet current guidelines for surgery. Guidelines were developed on the basis of the Fourth International Workshop on management of asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism (panel 1).⁵ Note that non-classic manifestations of primary hyperparathyroidism, such as easy fatigability and intellectual weariness, are not part of the current guidelines for surgery because no causal link or reversal of involvement has been established.¹² However, many health-care professionals have had experience with patients who show neurocognitive dysfunction that improves markedly after successful surgery. Yet, many patients with neurocognitive dysfunction cannot be differentiated from patients who improve after surgery and do not notice any improvement after surgery.

Guidelines for normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism were published for the first time in the proceedings of the Fourth International Workshop.⁵ Treatment of patients who are hypercalcaemic should comply with the guidelines for patients with hypercalcaemic disease. In patients with normocalcaemic

Panel 1: Guidelines for surgery in asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism⁹

- 1 Serum calcium concentration more than 0.25 mmol/L above the upper limit of normal range
- 2 Skeletal involvement
 - a) Reduced bone mineral density as a T score of less than -2.5 at any site (lumbar spine, hip, or distal one-third radius)
 - b) Vertebral fracture by radiography, CT, or vertebral fracture assessment
- 3 Renal involvement
 - a) Creatinine clearance less than 60 mL/min
 - b) Kidney stone or nephrocalcinosis by ultrasound, CT, or abdominal radiography
- 4 Hypercalciuria (>400 mg per day) accompanied by a biochemical stone risk profile that places the patient at risk of kidney stones
- 5 Age less than 50 years

Panel 2: Guidelines for medical monitoring of patients⁹

- 1 Annual assessment of serum calcium.
- 2 Three-site dual energy x-ray absorptiometry scan every 1–2 years, depending on local standards of care. For a chronic disorder like primary hyperparathyroidism, in which bone density can show slow decline over time, yearly bone mineral density assessment will permit detection of such trends earlier than bone mineral density assessment every 2 years.
- 3 If the clinical situation changes and an intervening vertebral fracture is suspected (ie, height loss and back pain), radiograph or vertebral fracture assessment should be obtained.
- 4 Annual assessment of creatinine clearance and serum creatinine.
- 5 If renal nephrolithiasis or nephrocalcinosis is suspected, abdominal imaging with radiography, CT, or ultrasound is recommended. A 24-h biochemical stone profile might also be indicated.

primary hyperparathyroidism who develop evidence of disease progression (eg, declining bone mineral density, fracture, and kidney stones), parathyroid surgery should be considered.⁵

Surgical management

Minimally invasive parathyroidectomy under local anaesthesia and conscious sedation is the procedure of choice in many centres, based on the assumption that the parathyroid gland or glands have been identified preoperatively. To identify abnormal parathyroid tissue, preoperative localisation approaches use ultrasound, ^{99m}Tc-sestamibi scintigraphy, CT, or four-dimensional CT. Imaging is strongly recommended for patients who are to have parathyroid surgery. The exact modality used depends on technological availability.¹⁰⁹ CT or four-dimensional CT with or without ^{99m}Tc-sestamibi scintigraphy is used in major medical centres, but high-resolution ultrasound is also routinely used. The standard approach in centres that are not equipped to perform CT or four-dimensional CT is ultrasound or sestamibi scintigraphy, or both. Other approaches include MRI and PET. The minimally invasive parathyroidectomy approach also requires the capability to measure parathyroid hormone concentrations intraoperatively.¹¹⁰ The parathyroid hormone concentration should decrease by more than 50% into the normal range within 10 min after removal of the diseased parathyroid gland or glands, which is the sign that cure has been achieved. Cure rates with parathyroidectomies are more than 98% in patients operated on by experienced parathyroid surgeons.^{100,101} Although parathyroid surgery is generally reserved for patients with symptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism and for patients with asymptomatic disease who meet the surgical guideline criteria, parathyroid surgery can also be done on patients who do not meet any criteria and are

free from complications of primary hyperparathyroidism. As long as no medical contraindications exist, and patients and their physicians have made an informed and agreed decision, no reason remains why parathyroid surgery cannot proceed.^{5,110}

Guidance from the Fourth International Workshop is also offered to patients who do not have parathyroid surgery (panel 2).⁵ If a patient meets one or more criteria in the guidelines for surgery during monitoring and no medical contraindications are found, surgery should be recommended.

Nutritional guidelines and medical management

Many patients with asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism do not have parathyroid surgery but are, instead, managed conservatively. Nutritional guidelines are important for all patients to consider.¹¹¹ One notion that should be dispelled is that patients with primary hyperparathyroidism should restrict their intake of calcium. Conversely, restriction of calcium intake could provide a further stimulus to abnormal parathyroid tissue to produce parathyroid hormone. National guidelines¹¹² recommended that calcium intake should also pertain to patients with primary hyperparathyroidism. Another important nutritional element is adequate vitamin D intake. Experimental evidence shows that patients with low vitamin D concentrations, as measured by circulating 25-hydroxyvitamin D, are at risk of more active disease.⁵⁰ Low vitamin D concentration could lead directly to further parathyroid hormone secretion from abnormal parathyroid tissue and indirectly by reduced absorption of dietary calcium. The plasma 25-hydroxyvitamin D concentration should be higher than 50 nmol/L, but some experts recommend concentrations of higher than 75 nmol/L.^{5,113}

Pharmacological approaches

Oestrogen was the first pharmacological approach to primary hyperparathyroidism and, at high doses, was associated with a reduction in serum calcium concentrations.^{114–116} Cinacalcet binds to regions of the calcium-sensing receptor complex, thereby enhancing sensitivity to the ambient calcium concentration. The cinacalcet-amplified calcium signal is transmitted to the parathyroid cell and thus reduces parathyroid hormone synthesis and secretion. Cinacalcet is approved for use in primary hyperparathyroidism and parathyroid cancer.^{117,118} Clinical trials^{119,120} with cinacalcet show that normalisation of serum calcium concentration occurs in most patients and parathyroid hormone concentrations decrease modestly. Continued use of cinacalcet for up to 5 years provides long-term control of serum calcium concentration.^{121–124} Furthermore cinacalcet does not appear to have any effect on bone mineral density. The use of the bisphosphonate, alendronate, has also been studied in primary hyperparathyroidism. In contrast to cinacalcet, the serum calcium concentration does not change but bone mineral density improves, particularly in the lumbar spine, in both women and men.^{125–129} A beneficial effect of alendronate has also been reported in patients with normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism.¹³⁰ Not surprisingly, the combination of cinacalcet and alendronate for primary hyperparathyroidism treatment has been of interest. Although data are not yet conclusive, this combination appears to be associated with an increase in bone density and reductions in serum calcium concentration.¹³¹ Other antiresorptive agents have not been studied in detail in primary hyperparathyroidism. Use of the receptor activator of nuclear factor kappa-B ligand inhibitor, denosumab, is an interesting approach because it inhibits a pathway that is important in the catabolic actions of parathyroid hormone.¹³²

Controversies and uncertainties

Normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism

The classification of normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism as a primary disorder could be questioned because of the uncertainty related to an unknown secondary stimulus that might foster raised concentrations of parathyroid hormone. Furthermore, consideration of the normal distribution range for any analyte is important. The so-called normal range of parathyroid hormone spans two standard deviations about the mean (eg, 10–65 ng/L), and some patients with normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism might be healthy, but are just on the fringe of the normal distribution curve for parathyroid hormone. Patients could be three standard deviations away from the mean and still be healthy, which is improbable but possible. Another point to consider is the possibility that a patient's normal serum calcium concentration might not actually be within the normal range for the population. The variance about the mean of a given circulating element is

Panel 3: Outstanding research questions

In this Seminar, we have embedded questions for which more research is needed to clarify areas of uncertainty, which are summarised as follows. This list was adapted from discussions among the expert panel at the time of the Fourth International Workshop on the management of asymptomatic primary hyperparathyroidism.⁵

- 1 Normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism: natural history, pathophysiology, and incidence throughout the world.
- 2 Vitamin D: improved understanding of the optimal nutritional and therapeutic value of 25-hydroxyvitamin D in the medical management of primary hyperparathyroidism.
- 3 Neurocognitive features of primary hyperparathyroidism: before and after parathyroid surgery and in patients who are followed up long-term without surgery.
- 4 Microstructure of bone in primary hyperparathyroidism, before and after successful surgery: these studies should include the use of high resolution peripheral quantitative tomography with the most sophisticated approaches to microstructural analysis. Trabecular bone score and reference point indentation are additional state-of-the-art approaches that need more complete investigation in primary hyperparathyroidism. Can these approaches be used to predict fracture risk before and fracture risk reduction after parathyroid surgery?
- 5 Is the fracture risk assessment tool sufficient to predict fracture risk in primary hyperparathyroidism? What risk factors contribute to fracture risk in primary hyperparathyroidism that are not included in the fracture risk assessment tool?
- 6 To what extent is a complete biochemical stone risk analysis helpful to predict stone risk in primary hyperparathyroidism? What is the incidence of kidney stones and nephrocalcinosis in patients with this history before successful parathyroidectomy?
- 7 Are there beneficial effects to using denosumab as a pharmacological approach to primary hyperparathyroidism?

generally narrower in an individual than the population variance for that element. A patient, for example, whose serum calcium is 2.25 mmol/L on average could be hypercalcaemic if their serum calcium concentration increases to 2.45 mmol/L. The patient's increased serum calcium concentration, however, is still within the normal population range and thus the patient would be diagnosed with normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism, although they actually are hypercalcaemic considering their clinical history. The vexing issue here is that the patient's average serum calcium concentration before they developed normocalcaemic primary hyperparathyroidism, is often not known (panel 3).

Vitamin D

Individuals exist who have developed primary hyperparathyroidism after years of a secondary stimulus for parathyroid hormone secretion. In severe malabsorption syndromes or renal failure, secondary hyperparathyroidism has given way, at times, to the selection of a clone of parathyroid cells that takes over and becomes an adenoma.¹³³ This observation raises the possibility that primary hyperparathyroidism in some individuals could be due to years of unrecognised vitamin D deficiency (panel 3). However, most experts do not view vitamin D deficiency as an aetiological feature of primary hyperparathyroidism.¹³⁴ The viewpoint against vitamin D having a primary role in the pathogenesis of primary

hyperparathyroidism comes from observations that average 25-hydroxyvitamin D concentration has increased among patients with primary hyperparathyroidism over the past 10 years,¹³⁵ but the incidence of primary hyperparathyroidism has also increased.⁴²

Neurocognition in primary hyperparathyroidism

Whether the non-specific neurocognitive elements of primary hyperparathyroidism are causally associated with the disease is unclear. Studies¹³⁶ so far have not definitively established this association. Furthermore, some specific neurocognitive features of primary hyperparathyroidism might exist while other neurocognitive features cannot. Further research is necessary to gain more insight into this issue (panel 3).

Fracture risk and recovery after successful surgery

Epidemiology and microstructural data support the idea of a global increase in fracture risk at all sites in primary hyperparathyroidism.^{85,137} However, whether fracture risk can be accounted for by low bone mineral density and other risk factors, as described in the fracture risk assessment tool, or whether other skeletal features of primary hyperparathyroidism, such as the micro-architectural abnormalities in both cortical and trabecular compartments are important in the assessment of fracture risk, is not known. How microstructural features change after successful parathyroid surgery and whether they are related to reduced fracture risk are further areas of uncertainty (panel 3).

Who needs surgery and who can be safely monitored?

Although the guidelines are helpful to direct the endocrinologist, surgeon, and patient in decision making, the matter is still controversial. Natural history studies clearly give support to the idea that some individuals can be safely monitored over long periods of time (panel 3).⁹⁵ The natural history studies also give support to another natural history in which the disease progresses in as many as 40% of subjects followed up for up to 15 years.⁹⁴ How these different natural histories can be sorted out in individuals who do not meet surgical guidelines at the time they are evaluated, is unclear.

Conclusion

In this Seminar, we have provided an updated account of the new concepts related to the presentation, cause, and management of primary hyperparathyroidism. The disorder presents ongoing challenges as features of its clinical recognition continue to evolve. These changes require regular access to new investigative tools with particular reference to target and off-target manifestations as well as reconsideration of concepts of surgical and non-surgical management.

Contributors

JPB conceived, organised, and wrote the Seminar. NEC, AK, and LB assisted in writing. All authors provided editorial revisions.

Declaration of interests

We declare no competing interests.

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