Carrier Detection in Hemophilia A: A Cooperative International Study. I. The Carrier Phenotype

By John B. Graham, Charles R. Rizza, Juan Chediak, Piero Mannuccio Mannucci, Ernest Briët, Rolf Ljung, Carol K. Kasper, E.M. Essien, and P.P. Green

Eight laboratories in six countries cooperated to clarify several issues concerning the phenotypes of heterozygous carriers of hemophilia "A." Plasma levels of factor VIII (F.VIII:C, formerly VIII:C) and von Willebrand factor (VWF:Ag, formerly VIIIIR:Ag) of carriers and normal women were determined by various "in-house" methods; a single lyophilized plasma standard was used for all assays. Analysis of the collated data from 336 carriers (296 obligatory carriers and 40 sporadic carriers) and 137 normal women showed that there was no difference in the F.VIII:C levels of "paternal" carriers (women who had obtained the abnormal gene from their fathers) and "maternal" carriers. Neither was there a difference in the VWF:Ag levels of normal women and either type of carrier. Age was found to have a significant effect on both F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag, values being higher at very young and very old ages, the minima occurring in the 25- to 30-year range. ABO blood type had a striking effect. Women of types A, B, and AB (designated non-O in the study), both normals and carriers, had significantly higher levels of both factors than did women of type O. Analysis by laboratories showed that differences in mean levels of both factors between laboratories were highly significant. It was concluded that age, ABO blood type, and laboratory variation should be taken into account in carrier detection.

*The International Committee on Thrombosis and Haemostasis has recommended that the term F.VIII be used when referring generally to this clotting factor, F.VIII:C when referring to its activity, and F.VIII:Ag (formerly F.VIII:Cag) when it is measured immunologically. It has also recommended that VWF be used when referring generally to the clotting factor missing in severe VWD, and VWF:Ag (formerly VIIIIR:Ag) when this factor is measured immunologically.

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the effect of ABO blood type on factor levels. Levels of F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag appear to be lower in persons of type O than those of types A, B, and AB. This was first reported by Preston and Barr in 1964 and has been confirmed several times since.  

A possible explanation for the conflicting reports is that they have been based upon studies of small, sometimes nonrepresentative populations. This possibility, particularly as it has concerned the differences between types of carriers, prompted the present study. The phenotypic characteristics of hemophilia A carriers are described in this article, and an analysis of the use of linear discriminants for carrier detection comprises the accompanying report.

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Experimental design. Each laboratory obtained blood from members of its group of carriers in its particular way. Plasma was prepared and assays were performed in each laboratory by current “in-house” methods. All test samples were collected and assayed between June 1982 and July 1983, and the results were sent to Chapel Hill for analysis. ABO blood types were determined later.

Participating laboratories. Participating laboratories were: (a) the Haemophilia Centre, Oxford, England; (b) the University of North Carolina; (c) the Orthopaedic Hospital of the University of Southern California, Los Angeles; (d) the University Hospital, University of Lund, Malmo, Sweden; (e) the A. Bianchi Bonomi Haemophilia and Thrombosis Centre, University of Milan, Italy; (f) the University of Leiden, Netherlands; (g) the Michael Reese Hospital, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois; and (h) the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Standard control plasma. Standard control plasma was produced at the Haemophilia Centre in Oxford by pooling six normal plasmas that had been prepared by centrifugation of blood collected into a buffered citrate anticoagulant (3.8% sodium citrate in 7% HEPES buffer at pH 7.4). Nine parts of blood had been added to one part of anticoagulant. The pooled plasma was freeze-dried in 1-mL aliquots and was stored until use in each laboratory at a temperature below −30 °C. It was reconstituted in 1 mL of distilled water. Potency of the reconstituted plasma was maintained for up to two hours at room temperature, and the laboratories were asked not to refreeze and reuse the standard. The potency of the standard was determined to be 0.53 IU of F.VIII:C per ampoule by calibration against the international standard.† The VWF:Ag of the lyophilized standard plasma was arbitrarily defined as 100 U per deciliter, since an international standard was not available at the onset of the study.

Blood collection and plasma preparation. Blood was carefully collected in each laboratory to assure that all samples were handled in the same fashion; samples were centrifuged for at least 20 minutes at speeds > 3,000 rpm or forces > 2,000 g, often at room temperature. Some laboratories assayed fresh plasmas; others examined frozen and stored plasmas.

Assays. Seven laboratories performed F.VIII:C assays by a one-stage method; a two-stage procedure was used at Oxford. No differences were observed in the distributions of normal values attributable to the type of assay for F.VIII. In four laboratories, F.VIII:Ag was determined by immunoradiometric assays (IRMAs) using polyclonal human antibodies. Assays for VWF:Ag were done in all laboratories by the local adaptation of the electroimmunossay (EIA) described originally by Laurell. VWF:Ag was also determined by IRMAs in three laboratories. Heterologous antibodies were used in the EIA, and both polyclonal and monoclonal antibodies against VWF:Ag were used in the IRMAs. VWF:Ag was also measured by a commercial enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay (ELISA) in Milan.

Population studied. Although the subjects were predominantly of west European ancestry, some subjects of African and Oriental ethnicity were introduced through the American and Nigerian subsamples. Women from a broad age range were examined to assess the effects of age on the variables. Five laboratories collected samples from normal women, and several laboratories collected samples from sporadic carriers. In one laboratory, each carrier was matched by a normal woman of the same age, whereas in four other laboratories a smaller sample of normal women was collected that covered the same age range as the carriers. Table 1 shows the study sample stratified for age and genotype.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decade</th>
<th>0-9</th>
<th>10-19</th>
<th>20-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70-79</th>
<th>80-89</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carriers (N = 332)</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal subjects (N = 136)</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>24.3</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

†The International Unit (IU) of F.VIII:C at the time of the study was based on a concentrate ~1.2 times the average unit of most carefully collected plasma pools. The values observed in this study were adjusted by multiplying them by 0.64 (1.2 × 0.53) to produce figures similar to those which are usually obtained in laboratories which use pooled normal plasma as the working standard.
were required to obtain a satisfactory fit over the range 10 to 11. Although both linear and quadratic, but not cubic, terms formed values were regressed on a cubic function of age. The effect of age on F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag levels was examined in both normal women and carriers. Logarithmically transformed values were regressed on a cubic function of age. Because there was not a difference between the F.VIII:Cs of the different types of carriers, all the carrier data, including the sporadic carriers, were pooled for the age effect calculations and the discriminant analyses.

VWF:Ag levels. The values for VWF:Ag as assessed by the Laurell method are shown in Table 4. The mean for the 137 normal women (first column) was 101 U per deciliter. As with F.VIII:C, there was a significant effect of age and institution on the level of VWF:Ag. When the means were adjusted for age and institution, there was not a significant difference between the types of carriers (P = .29). Because there was not a difference between the F.VIII:Cs of the different types of carriers, all the carrier data, including the sporadic carriers, were pooled for the age effect calculations and the discriminant analyses.

Effect of age on F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag levels. The effect of age on F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag levels was examined in both normal women and carriers. Logarithmically transformed values were regressed on a cubic function of age. Although both linear and quadratic, but not cubic, terms were required to obtain a satisfactory fit over the range 10 to 60 years of age, the range from 18 to 50 years of age could be fitted by a linear function. The best fitting quadratic functions of age for the normals and the carriers were the following: F.VIII:C for normal subjects was Ln(F.VIII:C) = .000360(age)² - .0209(age) + 4.78; for carriers, it was Ln(F.VIII:C) = .000317(age)² - .0193(age) + 4.15. VWF:Ag for normal subjects was Ln(VWF:Ag) = .000422(age)² - .0225(age) + 4.65; for carriers, it was Ln(VWF:Ag) = .000277(age)² - .0170(age) + 4.76.

Although the means for F.VIII:C in normal subjects and carriers were significantly different at all ages as expected (P < .0001), the age regression coefficients were not significantly different (P > .3). The mean VWF:Ag values were not different between normal subjects and carriers, although both showed an effect of age. Neither were the age regression coefficients on the transformed data different for normal subjects or carriers (P > .05).

Effect of ABO blood group on F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag levels. ABO blood types were available on most of the subjects of four laboratories. The frequencies of the blood types were: (among 54 normal subjects) O = 0.50, A = 0.362, B = 0.12, and AB = 0.017; and (among 198 carriers) O = 0.49, A = 0.38, B = 0.10, and AB = 0.03. These frequencies are typical of West European peoples.

Approximately 75% of non-Os are type A, and types B and AB appear to have somewhat larger effects on the variables concerned than does type A. Therefore, the subjects are grouped into two classes: O and non-O. The data relating F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag to ABO blood type are shown in Table 5 as comparisons between O and non-O subjects stratified for carriership and examined separately for F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag. In 13 of the 14 possible comparisons, the levels are higher in the non-O member of a pair. Using the data in Table 5, the differences in weighted averages (non-O > O) were for F.VIII:C, 22.9 U per deciliter in normal subjects and 10 U per deciliter in carriers. Comparable results for VWF:Ag were: 25.8 U/dL in normal subjects and 34.6 U/dL in carriers.

The significance of the difference between O and non-O subjects for F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag was confirmed using a general linear model which included age and laboratory as covariates (P < 0.01).
Table 4. VWF:AG Levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laboratory</th>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Paternal Carriers</th>
<th>Maternal Carriers</th>
<th>Pooled Carriers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>86 ± 31</td>
<td>95 ± 43</td>
<td>116 ± 34</td>
<td>104 ± 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapel Hill</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>110 ± 57</td>
<td>107 ± 87</td>
<td>108 ± 76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>122 ± 44</td>
<td>124 ± 69</td>
<td>125 ± 34</td>
<td>124 ± 53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milan</td>
<td>107 ± 61</td>
<td>98 ± 36</td>
<td>103 ± 38</td>
<td>101 ± 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>122 ± 54</td>
<td>116 ± 77</td>
<td>119 ± 67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malmo</td>
<td>85 ± 35</td>
<td>84 ± 24</td>
<td>105 ± 50</td>
<td>94 ± 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiden</td>
<td>103 ± 27</td>
<td>110 ± 36</td>
<td>110 ± 41</td>
<td>110 ± 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibadan</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>151 ± 64</td>
<td>151 ± 64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average of means</td>
<td>101 ± 47</td>
<td>105 ± 49</td>
<td>112 ± 60</td>
<td>108 ± 47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Levels of standard plasma activity arbitrarily set at 100 U/dL. Values are means ± SD.

DISCUSSION

Despite the fact that each of the participating laboratories collected blood somewhat differently and used similar though not identical assays, it was believed that the geographically separate groups of carriers could be collated for analysis, since all were based on the same standard. This lyophilized plasma has essentially the properties of plasma #80/511, now adopted by the WHO as the First International Reference Preparation for Factor VIII Related Activities in Plasma, and is very stable at temperatures below −30°C.

A major variable in the study was the difference in mean levels of F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag between laboratories. Klein and colleagues ascribed similar interlaboratory variation largely to differences in laboratory technique, because the same group of women was examined in a single laboratory setting by different technicians using a single standard. Barrowcliffe and colleagues and we have observed significant differences in the means between laboratories when a single standard was used on separate small populations.

The data of Klein and co-workers clearly document that women of blood type 0 have lower F.VIII:C and VWF:AG levels than do women who are not of blood type 0.

Table 5. ABO Blood Group and Factors VIII:C and VWF:Ag in Normal Women and Carriers of Hemophilia A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Laboratory</th>
<th>Statistic</th>
<th>Factor VIII:C</th>
<th>VWF:Ag</th>
<th>Factor VIII:C</th>
<th>VWF:Ag</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Non-O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>Non-O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapel Hill</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>79.9</td>
<td>132.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD (No.)</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>36.0</td>
<td>48.3</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(42)</td>
<td>(46)</td>
<td>(42)</td>
<td>(46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>86.2</td>
<td>120.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD (No.)</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>29.8</td>
<td>40.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(29)</td>
<td>(27)</td>
<td>(29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiden</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>53.2</td>
<td>98.1</td>
<td>118.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD (No.)</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>28.4</td>
<td>33.9</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
<td>(16)</td>
<td>(22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>51.5</td>
<td>143.0</td>
<td>121.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SD (No.)</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>16.2</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>27.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
not of type O, and that this is a significant variable that affects carrier detection. The physiological relationship between ABO type and the level of these clotting factors is obscure. Highly purified preparations of F.VIII containing ABO blood group substance have been described, but this does not necessarily mean that it is a functionally important part of the F.VIII complex. The genetic information tends to suggest the opposite in fact, i.e.: (a) the ABO types are present when F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag are absent; (b) the genes for ABO and VWD are not linked in the usual sense; and (c) the gene for F.VIII:C is on the X-chromosome whereas the ABO locus is on chromosome 9. Nevertheless, F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag levels are clearly lower in persons of blood type O, a variable included in the discriminant function published by Winter and co-workers. Orstavik and colleagues concluded that the ABO blood group has a greater genetic effect on levels of F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag in normal persons than does any other genetic mechanism, including isoalleles at the F.VIII:C locus. Their data suggested that the primary effect of ABO is on the level of VWF:Ag and that the effect on F.VIII:C is secondary. How these independent genes interact is unknown, but it might occur posttranslationally through interaction of their products. The type of ABO substance on the cell membrane for instance, may influence the rate at which the clotting factors exit from the cell. But there are many other possibilities.

Two other matters that were of concern to the WHO Committee in 1977 were not studied, but it seems worthwhile to note them. They wished to determine whether carriership can be detected accurately in women who are already pregnant when first seen. Subsequent studies by Mibashan and colleagues, Hoyer and colleagues and Barrow and colleagues have demonstrated that the procedures recommended by the WHO are satisfactory for pregnant carriers who can be detected without difficulty at least until the 22nd week of gestation. They also wished to discover whether the taking of oral contraceptives confounds carrier detection. Stableforth and colleagues and McCallum and colleagues have reported that the use of oral contraceptives does not affect levels of F.VIII:C and VWF:Ag. This was not a matter of importance in the present study, since only 5 of 473 subjects (1.1%) reported using this form of birth control. This may well be an underestimate of the true frequency of contraceptive use by all women, however, since many of our subjects were unmarried, prepubertal, or postmenopausal.

Kobrinisky and co-workers have reported that in plasma samples obtained one hour after the administration of a small dose of DDAVP there is a comparable rise of VWF:Ag in both carriers and normal women, whereas the increase in F.VIII:C is less among carriers. The rate of misclassification on single testing after DDAVP administration in their small sample was ~5%, comparable to the rate found earlier with triple testing using the ordinary procedure. If this is confirmed, administration of DDAVP together with corrections for age, ABO blood type, and laboratory variation might greatly enhance the likelihood of correctly classifying hemophilia carriers by phenotypic methods.

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