Efficacy of Intravitreal Bevacizumab with Cryotherapy for Zone II Stage 3 + Retinopathy of Prematurity

Ali Kasiri1*, Foad Haghi1, Mostafa Feghhi1, Fereidon Farrahi1, Hesam Hedayati1, Mohammad Montazeri2

1Department of Ophthalmology, Faculty of Medicine, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran, 2Faculty of Medicine, Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran

Abstract

Objective: Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), originally known as vascular permeability factor with different important roles in triggering vasculogenesis and angiogenesis. This protein has a pivotal role in retinopathy of prematurity (ROP). This study aims to evaluate the efficacy of VEGF inhibitor with cryotherapy for zone II Stage 3 plus ROP. Methods: In a prospective controlled clinical trial was performed on 6 infants, 12 eyes with zone II Stage 3 plus ROP. There was neurological visual impairment (NVI) in one eye. Under general anesthesia after confirmation of staging, prep and drape done cryotherapy of avascular retina in two rows combined with intravitreal injection of 0.625 mg bevacizumab in 0.025 ml was performed, and in one eye with iris neovascularization 0.625 mg intracameral bevacizumab injected too, all eyes were examined in 3 days, 1st, 4th, and 12th week after procedure. Results: Regression of NVI in 3 days and retinal neovascularization in 1 week period post operation. Conclusion: One session cryotherapy combined with intravitreal injection of 0.625 mg of bevacizumab can be effective in management of zone II Stage 3 plus ROP, more studies with more participants seems to be necessary.

Key words: Cryotherapy, intravitreal bevacizumab, prematurity, retinopathy

INTRODUCTION

Retinopathy of prematurity (ROP) is a leading cause of childhood blindness worldwide. There is an abnormal proliferation of vessels in developing retina.[1] It affects the motor cortex, verbal, conceptual, and social development of the child.[2,3] It is characterized by proliferation of abnormal vessels in developing retina, such as diabetic and sickle cell retinopathies.[4,5] The international classification of ROP describes the progress and treatment method of the disease.[6,7] Vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), also known as vascular permeability factor, is a signal protein produced by cells that stimulate vasculogenesis and angiogenesis. It is a potent angiogenic factor and an essential growth factor for vascular endothelial cells. VEGF is up-regulated in many tumors, and its contribution to tumor angiogenesis is well defined the VEGF plays different important roles in ROP.[8] Destruction of cells due to hyperoxia causes the release of cell content and VEGF.[9] It causes the increase of fibrovascular tissue growth in peripheral retina specifically. These factors also exacerbate the growth of vessels in anterior and posterior segment.[9]

Treatments such as cryotherapy and laser therapy in suitable time causes decrease in VEGF, and neovascular proliferation, the treated patients, should be followed up carefully because cell destruction by cryotherapy and laser therapy may cause cell destruction and more release of VEGF.[10] The time of cryotherapy and laser therapy in patients with ROP is doubtful.[11] The time of development of complications in neovascular ROP is not exactly clear, and the exact time for cryotherapy and laser therapy is controversial.[12-16]

Address for correspondence:
Ali Kasiri, Department of Ophthalmology, Faculty of Medicine, Alhavz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, Ahvaz, Iran E-mail: iranalikasiri343@gmail.com

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The administration of anti-VEGF agents was useful in the treatment of different cancers, intravenous injection of bevacizumab in 2004 for the treatment of colon cancer and metastatic pulmonary cancer was successful.\cite{17-21} The food and drug administration approved intravitreal bevacizumab injection for treatment of neovascular diseases of retina in 2006; it was used in age-related macular degeneration.\cite{17-21} Ablative treatment employing cryotherapy and laser therapy in immature infants may stop the disease.\cite{17-21}

According to the previous studies, there is not a suitable treatment for all patients, the disease may progress after cryotherapy and laser therapy in 10-15% of patients and retinal detachment may develop in 50% of patients with Stage 3 plus disease ROP.\cite{9} Therefore, this study was aimed to evaluate the efficacy of intravitreal bevacizumab with cryotherapy for treatment of zone II Stage 3 plus ROP.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this prospective, controlled clinical trial study 6 patients, 12 eyes with zone II Stage 3 ROP were enrolled in the study. These patients were referred to Imam Khomeini Hospital of Ahvaz in 2010-2011; all patients had Hx of neonatal intensive care unit admission. There was not any systemic anomaly in all patients. One eye only had neurological visual impairment for 3 O’clock. The mean gestational age and weight were 28 weeks (26-35 weeks) and 1280 g (1150-1500 g), respectively.

All patients were examined under GIA by three retina specialists using indirect ophthalmoscope to confirm the staging of the disease first, then prep and drape was done using 5% betadine solution, blepharostat was placed, cryotherapy was performed to ablate the avascular retina in two rows with mild whitening of avascular retina, CO\(_2\) gas was used for cryotherapy, then 0.625 mg of bevacizumab in 0.025 ml was injected in vitreous using a 30 gauge needle, 1.5 mm post to limbus, this dosage was selected because vitreous volume in limbus, this dosage was selected because vitreous volume in immature infants is percentage of adults vitreous volume.

One patient with iris neovascularization received intracameral 0.625 mg of bevacizumab additionally; at the end of procedure one drop 5% betadine was installed in the eye for 1 min. The eye was examined by indirect ophthalmoscope for possible intra-operative complications. The patients were treated with topical chloramphenicol eye drops QID for 4 days. All patients were examined on 3 days, 1\(^{st}\), 4\(^{th}\) and 12\(^{th}\) week after the procedure to evaluate the condition of retina and abnormal vessels. All of the study procedures and the potential benefits and risks were clearly explained to the participants and their parents and then, the parents of children filled and signed a written consent form on the participation in the study. For data analyses, a statistical package of SPSS (version 16) with Chi-square test was used.

### RESULTS

Retinal vessel tortuosity was decreased significantly and iris neovascularization improved 3 days after injection, and retinal neovascularization was disappeared in all patients after 1 week. Descriptive data of cases illustrated in Table 1.

There was no ROP in all patients after 4 weeks. A small preretinal hemorrhage developed in one patient, which was absorbed in 3 weeks. There was no sign of endophthalmitis or increased intraocular pressure in the follow-up assessments.

### DISCUSSION

There was zone II Stage 3 plus disease ROP in all eyes, iris neovascularization was present in one eye, cryotherapy and intravitreal injection of bevacizumab were performed for all eyes. The eye with iris neovascularization received intracameral bevacizumab too.

Neovascularization of iris and vessel tortuosity and dilation were resolved after 3 days. Retinal neovascularization regressed after 1 week. According to the previous studies, cryotherapy and laser therapy may be insufficient for cure, and the disease may progress in 10-15% of patients, and retinal detachment may develop in 50% of Stage 3 plus ROP patients.\cite{9}

Since the effect of cryotherapy may be insufficient for treatment of ROP, intravitreal injection of bevacizumab was done at the time of cryotherapy. In one study in 2007, patients were divided into three groups. The first group was treated with intravitreal bevacizumab, and in the second group one eye of each patient was treated with laser therapy and intravitreal bevacizumab injection in the same eye, and in the third group both eyes of each patient were treated with laser therapy and intravitreal bevacizumab injection. The findings of this study demonstrated that the neovascularization regressed in all groups no systemic complication was noted.\cite{22} There are four studies in literature; that shows an intravitreal injection of bevacizumab was effective in regression of fibrovascular tissue in ROP patients.\cite{23} In one eye which laser therapy was not successful, 7 days after injection of intravitreal bevacizumab vascular tissue regressed but tractional retinal detachment develops due to contraction of fibrotic tissue.\cite{24}

In another study, 13 eyes were enrolled; retinal detachment developed in 4 eyes after intravitreal injection of bevacizumab and all of them were treated by deep vitrectomy.\cite{10} VEGF is necessary for normal vascularization in growing infants, and anti-VEGF properties can be harmful for normal vascularization.\cite{25} Pediatric oncologist used systemic bevacizumab injection for treatment of soft tissue malignancies in 20 patients.(kind and reference) The administration of the drug was every 2 weeks, to control the effect Of bevacizumab on growth plate of long bones,
X-ray films were obtained from tibia and fibula every 2 weeks.[25]

This study shows that systemic administration of bevacizumab in doses <15 mg/kg is tolerated well without any side effect, no hypertension and cardiopulmonary side effects were noticed in this study.[25] Similarly, Autrata et al. showed that cryotherapy and laser therapy destroyed the retinal tissue and the concentration of VEGF during the study period was significantly reduced which in turn enhanced the therapeutic efficacy of the combined approach in ROP.[26] The findings of our study support this finding indicating effective therapeutic efficacy of combined cryotherapy with laser therapy for treatment of Stage 3 plus ROP.

**CONCLUSION**

This study tried to evaluate the efficacy of intravitreal bevacizumab with cryotherapy for treatment of zone II Stage 3 plus ROP in the rat model. The results showed that combining cryotherapy with intravitreal injection of bevacizumab could rapidly inhibit the VEGF activity and therefore, significantly improved the therapeutic effect of the combined treatment approach in ROP. However, further controlled studies are needed to reach a decisive conclusion on the efficacy of cryotherapy combined with intravitreal bevacizumab in the treatment of zone II Stage 3 plus ROP.

**REFERENCES**


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