BJPsych | The British Journal of Psychiatry (2010) 197, 75–77

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Edited by Kiriakos Xenitidis and Colin Campbell

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False-positive results with an alcometer device

We write to report false-positive results with an alcometer device (Lion S-D2 brand) when it is used in the vicinity of recently applied alcohol disinfectant hand rub.

The Orchard Clinic is a medium secure forensic unit set within the grounds of the Royal Edinburgh Hospital. The use of an alcometer is essential in the treatment of Scottish government 'restricted' patients or if there is suspicion or evidence of alcohol misuse. Indeed, all staff receive training on the use of the alcometer during their induction period.

Recently a patient with 'restricted' status returned from leave outwith the clinic. On the patient's return they were breathalysed. The alcometer gave a reading of 0.04 mg/lBrAC – equivalent to just under one unit of alcohol. The patient denied consuming alcohol. Staff had used an alcohol-based hand disinfectant lotion prior to carrying out the test. This was consistent with hand hygiene guidelines following the H1N1 flu pandemic.

We later reproduced the positive alcometer results after using alcohol hand lotion in the standard way. The reading rose from 0.01 mg/lBrAC (background reading) to 0.1 mg/lBrAC – equivalent to two units of alcohol.

The alcohol hand rub used within NHS Lothian is up to 80% alcohol, which is one of the highest on the market.[1] It is therefore likely there is much alcohol in the vapour around where it is used. When the individual inhales prior to the test, some alcohol vapour is also taken in which is exhaled back into the instrument as part of their sample.

False-positive alcometer results may have serious implications for the treatment of forensic patients. No other report of alcohol hand lotion raising alcometer readings was found in the literature. It had not been reported as an issue with local colleagues in the Alcohol Problem Service or with Lothian and Borders Police. However, it is recognised that the police may carry out the test in a more open environment than a ward treatment room.

In addition to reporting this finding to the manufacturer, the local procedure for operating the alcometer has now been amended to ensure that alcohol hand lotion: (a) is not used by any staff involved in taking an alcometer reading at least 5 min before taking the test; and (b) is not used in the same room at least 5 min before a test is carried out.

Staff are encouraged to use soap and water to clean their hands before administering an alcometer test.

1 B. Braun Melsungen AG. Softalind/Softa-man ViscoRub. Safety Data Sheet according to Regulation (EU) No. 1907/2006 (revision date 08/12/08). B. Braun Melsungen AG, 2008 (http://www.bbraun.com/cps/rde/xchg/bbraun-com/hs.xsl/products.html?id=0002074151000000126&prid=PRID00003878).

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doi: 10.1192/bjp.197.1.75

Molecular genetics and the relationship between epilepsy and psychosis

We read with interest the paper by Adachi *et al*[1] in which they conclude that early development of interictal psychosis in people with epilepsy may reflect individual vulnerabilities to psychosis, including genetic, rather than being driven by epilepsy-related damage.

As they point out, their conclusion challenges traditional assumptions about the relationship between epilepsy and psychosis, many of which have been based on relatively sparse data. It is of interest that recent molecular genetic findings in psychosis suggest that the comorbidity of psychotic symptoms and epilepsy is a product of shared underlying biological mechanisms. For example, specific genomic structural variants (copy number variants) have been described that predispose to schizophrenia, epilepsy, as well as some other 'neurodevelopmental' phenotypes such as autism and intellectual disability.[2] Individuals with such structural variants do not typically have both schizophrenia and epilepsy, but rather some with a variant have schizophrenia, others have epilepsy, and others have a different phenotype or are unaffected. This means that the relationship cannot be caused simply by 'toxic' effects of epileptic seizures on the brain. Rather the finding strongly suggests that one or more genes, the function of which is disturbed by the structural variant, play(s) a role in the pathogenesis of both epilepsy and psychosis.

A second recent observation of potential interest concerns genes encoding ion channels. Ion channelopathies are known to underlie some epilepsies, so it is of great interest that variation within the gene *CACNA1C* (encoding a subunit of the L-type voltage-dependent calcium channel) is associated with schizophrenia as well as recurrent depression and bipolar disorder.[3,4] This suggests that ion channel dysfunction may be also be involved in mood and psychotic illness. Again, this provides support for the possibility that some individuals might experience both psychosis and epilepsy at least in part because of an underlying vulnerability to both.

It is likely that as the understanding of brain function increases we will move closer to understanding the complexities, multiple associations and comorbidities that commonly occur in psychiatric illness. A sufficient number of adequately trained psychiatrists working within appropriate services will be vital for translating this knowledge into benefits for patients.[5]

1 Adachi N, Akanuma N, Ito M, Kato M, Hara T, Oana Y, et al. Epileptic, organic and genetic vulnerabilities for timing of the development of interictal psychosis. *Br J Psychiatry* 2010; **196**: 212–6.

2 Craddock N, Owen MJ. The Kraepelinian dichotomy – going, going… but still not gone. *Br J Psychiatry* 2010; **196**: 92–5.

3 Ferreira MA, O'Donovan MC, Meng YA, Jones IR, Ruderfer DM, Jones L, et al. Collaborative genome-wide association analysis supports a role for ANK3 and CACNA1C in bipolar disorder. *Nat Genet* 2008; **40**: 1056–8.

4 Green EK, Grozeva D, Jones I, Jones L, Kirov G, Caesar S, et al. The bipolar disorder risk allele at CACNA1C also confers risk of recurrent major