Effects of long-term treatment with inhaled cromoglycate and budesonide on bronchial hyperresponsiveness in patients with allergic asthma

J. Molema, C.L.A. van Herwaarden, H.Th.M. Folgering

Eur Respir J. 1989, 2, 308-316

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ABSTRACT: Twenty two allergic patients with bronchial asthma completed this study. Effects of long-term treatment with inhaled cromoglycate 4 x 2 mg·day⁻¹ were compared to the effects of inhaled budesonide 4 x 0.1 mg·day⁻¹ on symptoms, additional β₂-agonist use, lung function and bronchial hyperresponsiveness measured by the provocation concentration of histamine producing a 20% fall in forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV₁) (PC₁₀ histamine) and exercise-induced fall in FEV₁. The study was carried out in a double-blind way with a randomized crossover design using a double-dummy technique. After a single-blind placebo period, the two active treatment periods of 6 weeks were separated by a single-blind placebo period. Symptom score and β₂-agonist use decreased during both active treatment periods, which showed no mutual differences. Morning and evening peak expiratory flow rates were significantly higher during treatment with budesonide versus placebo (p<0.01 and p<0.001), and also versus cromoglycate (p<0.02 and p<0.05). FEV₁ showed improvement after a 6 week treatment with budesonide versus placebo (p<0.05), although there was no significant difference between the two active treatments. PC₁₀ histamine did not change during treatment with cromoglycate. Budesonide showed a significant increase in PC₁₀ histamine versus placebo (p<0.05) and was marginally significantly better than cromoglycate (p=0.05). Exercise-induced fall in FEV₁ was not changed by cromoglycate, but improved significantly during budesonide in comparison with placebo (p<0.01) and also with cromoglycate (p<0.001). Both cromoglycate and budesonide showed anti-asthmatic effects. Improvement in lung function was more pronounced during treatment with budesonide. Budesonide decreased bronchial hyperresponsiveness, expressed by PC₁₀ histamine as well as exercise-induced fall in FEV₁, whereas cromoglycate did not.

One of the main features of bronchial asthma, with or without allergy, is an increased bronchial responsiveness to nonspecific stimuli such as cold air, smoke, exercise and to pharmacological agents such as histamine and methacholine. The presence and degree of bronchial hyperresponsiveness can be demonstrated by assessing the broncho-obstructive response to these various stimuli in the lung function laboratory. Nowadays, the provocation test with inhaled histamine is well standardized and can be used to measure bronchial hyperresponsiveness; furthermore, there is a relationship between this measurement and the severity of the asthmatic symptoms [1, 2].

Pharmacological treatment of patients with bronchial asthma should be directed at relieving the actual bronchoconstriction and, if possible, at reducing the increased bronchial responsiveness. Examples of prophylactic drugs that do not have direct bronchodilating effects are cromoglycate and corticosteroids. A single dose of inhaled cromoglycate, prior to allergen exposure, prevents both early rapid and late sustained phase bronchoconstrictive reactions [3, 4]. A single dose of inhaled corticosteroids, prior to allergen exposure, mainly prevents the late phase bronchoconstrictive reaction [4, 5]. During the late phase asthmatic reaction inflammatory changes develop in the bronchial wall [6]. An increase in bronchial hyperresponsiveness to nonspecific stimuli is seen when a late phase asthmatic reaction occurs after allergen exposure, an increase that sometimes lasts several days [5, 7]. As both inhaled cromoglycate and inhaled corticosteroids prevent the late phase asthmatic reaction, an influence of these drugs on bronchial hyperresponsiveness may be expected. Studies of long-term treatment of bronchial hyperresponsiveness with inhaled cromoglycate show no clear and partially conflicting results.
Budesonide, a recently developed corticosteroid for inhalation use, decreases bronchial hyperresponsiveness during long-term treatment in allergic children with bronchial asthma [10, 11].

The aim of this comparative study was to elucidate the effects of inhaled cromoglicate and budesonide on pulmonary function and bronchial hyperresponsiveness during long-term treatment in adult allergic patients with bronchial asthma. The bronchial hyperresponsiveness was assessed by two methods: the exercise provocation test as an example of a physiological challenge and the histamine provocation test as a standard pharmacological challenge.

**Patients and methods**

**Patient characteristics**

Patient characteristics are listed in table 1. Thirty one patients (19 M, 12 F) participated in the study, aged 15-47 yrs (mean age 27 yrs). One patient (No. 20, 26) participated twice. Basal forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV₁) had to be ≥50% of the predicted value [12], range: 51-106% (mean 74%). Acute reversibility of FEV₁ had to be more than 15% in response to an inhaled β₂-agonist. Airway hyperresponsiveness was expressed as the provocation dose of histamine producing a 20% fall in FEV₁ (PC₂₀ histamine) which was measured by means of the COCKCROFT and HARGRAVE method [1] and had to be ≤8 mg·ml⁻¹, range: responsive to saline up to 2 mg·ml⁻¹ histamine (geometric mean 0.69 mg·ml⁻¹). All the patients had an allergic constitution. Allergy was demonstrated by clearly positive intracutaneous skin tests. These tests had to be positive with respect to the house dust mite allergen and two other common inhalational allergens corresponding with the case history. The skin tests had to be negative for seasonal allergens like tree and grass pollen (Pharmalgen® 100 BU·ml⁻¹ standardized extracts, Pharmacia AB, Uppsala, Sweden). Current medication to control symptoms consisted of inhaled corticosteroids,

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<th>PC₂₀ histamine mg·ml⁻¹</th>
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Mean 27 74 0.09

*: the same patient; S: responsive to 0.9% saline inhalation; FEV₁: forced expiratory volume in one second; PC₂₀: provocation concentration of histamine causing a 20% fall in FEV₁, measured after 2 weeks placebo; t: inhaled β₂-sympathomimetics; c: inhaled cromoglicate; t: oral theophylline; s: inhaled steroids; (PC₂₀ column): histamine provocation test not performed (patient withdrawal during placebo treatment).
inhaled cromoglycate, inhaled \beta_2\text{-sympathomimetics and sustained-release theophylline preparations taken orally. All these treatments were discontinued at the start of the study.}

Excluded were patients who were pregnant, patients with serious concomitant diseases, recent airway infections (<8 weeks), recent systemic oral or intravenous treatment with corticosteroids (<12 months) and those not being able to handle a peak expiratory flow meter and/or metered-dose inhalers or to fill out diary cards.

**Study design**

The study was carried out in a double-blind way with a randomized cross over design using a double-dummy technique. The whole study lasted 17 weeks. First, there was a single-blind washout placebo period (I) of 2 weeks, followed by two periods of active treatment, each lasting 6 weeks, separated by a single-blind placebo period (II) of 3 weeks (fig. 1).

![Study design](image)

**Study drugs**

During the study only the following drugs were used:

1. Cromoglycate metered-dose inhalers (1 mg per actuation) and placebo inhalers of identical appearance (Fisons Ltd, Loughborough, UK);
2. Budesonide metered-dose inhalers (0.05 mg per actuation) and placebo inhalers of identical appearance (Draco AB, Lund, Sweden);
3. As rescue medication, ritodrine metered-dose inhalers (0.2 mg per actuation, Riker-3M Nederland BV, Zoeterwoude, The Netherlands) or salbutamol dry powder inhalations (0.2 mg per capsule, Glaxo BV, Nieuwegein, The Netherlands) could be used.

Throughout the 17 weeks of the study the patients were instructed to use two actuations of both cromoglycate/placebo and budesonide/placebo inhalers four times daily. During the periods of active treatment the patients thus inhaled 8 mg cromoglycate daily or 0.4 mg budesonide daily. During the whole study ritodrine or salbutamol could be used as rescue medication if necessary.

Both the use of the study drugs and the rescue medication were recorded on diary cards. The small drug-canisters were weighed afterwards, to evaluate compliance.

**Measurements**

**Visit 1.** At the beginning of the study lung function indices were measured in the morning after withholding bronchodilators for a period of at least 8 h, and after refraining from vigorous physical exercise. Flow volume equipment was used (Pneumoscreen, Jaeger) to determine the best values of three attempts were evaluated. New the single-blind placebo period started for 2 weeks.

Every day throughout the period of 17 weeks of the study the patients filled out diary cards concerning symptom scores, morning and evening peak expiratory flow rate measurements and the use of rescue medication. Peak expiratory flow rate was measured with a Wright peak flow mini-meter (Airmed, Clement Clarke Int Ltd, UK). The best of three attempts before using a \beta_2\text{-agonist was recorded daily. Pulmonary symptoms such as dyspnoea, wheeze and cough were recorded daily, using a 0-5 scale (0=none to 5=severe symptoms). The quantity of expectoration was also recorded on a 0-5 scale (0=none to 5=at least one coffee cup filled).

Clinical assessments were all made by the same investigator (author J.M.) making use of a standard questionnaire. Specific questions were asked about the severity of day-time and night-time complaints of dyspnoea, wheeze, cough and about the severity of exercise- and smoke-induced dyspnoea using a 0-3 scale (0=none to 3=severe). Efficacy and side-effects were also recorded. Signs of infection of the airways during the study were considered a reason for withdrawal.

Visits 2–7. For visit 2, after 2 weeks, and for the other visits, after every third week, the patients arrived at the outpatient clinic every morning at the same time as for visit 1, refraining from vigorous physical exercise. No medication whatsoever was allowed for a period of 8 h before each visit.

Baseline lung function was measured followed by a histamine provocation test according to the Cockscrew and Hargreave method [1]. After reaching >20% fall in FEV\textsubscript{1}, PC\textsubscript{20} histamine was calculated by linear interpolation of the log-histamine concentration versus ΔFEV\textsubscript{1} response curve. For statistical reasons, PC\textsubscript{20} was arbitrarily set at 0.02 mg·ml\textsuperscript{-1} in the calculations, if a >20% fall in FEV\textsubscript{1} was seen after inhalation of the lowest histamine concentration (0.03 mg·ml\textsuperscript{-1}). Likewise, if a >20% fall in FEV\textsubscript{1} was already seen after inhaling saline 0.9%, PC\textsubscript{20} was set at 0.01 mg·ml\textsuperscript{-1}.

After a pause of at least 30 min and recording of FEV\textsubscript{1} to at least 95% of baseline FEV\textsubscript{1}, an exercise provocation test was performed. After getting accustomed to the treadmill for 30 s at a speed of 3 km/h\textsuperscript{-1} the speed was raised until the heart rate reached 80% of the age-related predicted maximum heart rate (220 minus age in yrs) per min. At this level the
LONG-TERM CROMOGLYCATE AND BUDENOSIDE IN ASTHMA

Table 2. Effects of treatment with placebo, cromoglycate and budesonide on symptom score, peak expiratory flow rate and \( \beta_2 \)-agonist use (n=22, mean values)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Diary card scores (0-5)</th>
<th>Placebo</th>
<th>Cromoglycate 6 mg</th>
<th>Budesonide 6 mg</th>
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<td>Wks</td>
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<tr>
<td>1/2</td>
<td>0.74***</td>
<td>0.69***</td>
<td>0.61***</td>
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<tr>
<td>2/3</td>
<td>0.46**</td>
<td>0.42***</td>
<td>0.33***</td>
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<td>5+6</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.37**</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Morning PEFR l.min\(^{-1}\) 448 463 473* 467 482** 489**

Evening PEFR l.min\(^{-1}\) 483 496 504** 504* 520** 522**

PEFR drop/night l.min\(^{-1}\) 33 33 30 37 37 33

\( \beta_2 \)-agonist use inhalations/day\(^{-1}\) 2.81 2.34 1.74* 1.78* 1.23** 1.48*

FEFR: peak expiratory flow rate; *: p<0.05; **: p<0.01; ***: p<0.001; all significance values compared to placebo I.

Exercise lasted 6 min. After that 1 min was taken to reduce the speed of the treadmill. Ventilatory capacity was measured before the test and 1, 3, 6, 9, 12 and 15 min after completing the exercise. The largest fall in \( \text{FEV}_1 \) expressed as percentage fall in \( \text{FEV}_1 \) versus the initial value of \( \text{FEV}_1 \) was used for calculations. The test was performed under constant room temperature (19±1°C) and relative humidity conditions (60±10%).

Statistical analysis

Paired t-tests were used to compare the spirometric parameters, the exercise-induced fall in lung function and the peak expiratory flow rate recordings at home. Paired t-tests and non-parametric tests (Wilcoxon) were used to compare the \( 10 \log \text{PC}_{20} \) histamine, clinical assessment scores and symptoms. The results after 3 and 6 weeks of active therapy were compared to the results after the first placebo period. The diary card parameters were averaged taking the last 2 weeks of each drug or placebo period.

Two-tailed p values below 0.05 were considered statistically significant.

Ethical considerations

The study was approved by the local Medical Ethics Committee. Informed consent was obtained from each patient after presenting a written outline of the study summarizing the protocol.

Results

Twenty two patients of the 31 who entered, completed the whole study. Nine patients were withdrawn from the study. One person entered and was withdrawn twice due to respiratory tract infection, once during treatment with cromoglycate, once during treatment with placebo. One other patient dropped out during treatment with cromoglycate due to respiratory tract infection. Three other patients dropped out during treatment with placebo due to worsening of their asthma, intolerance and non-compliance. Four patients were withdrawn from the study during treatment with budesonide because of pregnancy (1), respiratory tract infection (2) and deterioration of asthma (1). The results after the two placebo periods and the results after treatment with cromoglycate and budesonide are presented for the 22 patients who completed the study.

The results obtained at the end of the two placebo periods were comparable. The results measured during treatment with cromoglycate and budesonide were compared with the values found after the first placebo period. The exercise-induced fall in lung function was more pronounced after the second placebo period than after the first placebo period (24.8% vs 16.7%, p<0.05). This increased fall in lung function, however, was not related to the type of treatment given before this placebo period. The changes in lung function after exercise were compared with the placebo values obtained after placebo treatment given just before the drug concerned; these placebo values did not show any statistically significant differences.

Daily symptom scores, peak expiratory flow rate measurements and the use of rescue medication were collected from the diary cards (table 2). Symptom scores during the two active treatment periods were decreased in comparison to treatment with placebo. The differences between the effects of the two drugs were small and not statistically significant.

During the first 3 weeks of treatment with cromoglycate, morning and evening peak expiratory flow rates were significantly higher in comparison to treatment with placebo (p<0.05 and p<0.01, respectively). Only the evening peak expiratory flow rate remained significantly higher during the second 3 weeks (p<0.05). During the first as well as the second 3 weeks of treatment with budesonide, both morning (p<0.01) and evening peak expiratory flow rate (p<0.001) were
weeks of treatment for day-time dyspnoea (p=0.03), wheeze (p=0.049), cough (p=0.04) and exercise-induced symptoms (p=0.02). However, this could no longer be observed after 6 weeks of treatment. Only exercise-induced symptoms remained significantly decreased during treatment with budesonide compared to treatment with cromoglycate after 6 weeks (p<0.05).

Baseline FEV₁ (fig. 2) showed no change during treatment with cromoglycate. Treatment with budesonide caused a significant improvement in FEV₁ after 6 weeks of treatment (p<0.05). The differences between the effects of the two drugs were small and not statistically significant.

PC₂₀ histamine (fig. 3) showed no change during treatment with cromoglycate. Treatment with budesonide caused a significant increase after 3 weeks (p<0.01) and 6 weeks (p<0.05). Using the non-parametric Wilcoxon's signed rank test, the budesonide-induced effect is significant (p<0.01) both after 3 and 6 weeks. The difference between treatment with budesonide and cromoglycate was marginally statistically significant after 3 weeks (p=0.07) and after 6 weeks (p=0.05).

![Fig. 2. - Effects of treatment with placebo (0), cromoglycate (4x2 mg) and budesonide (4x0.1 mg) on forced expiratory volume in one second (FEV₁) as percentage predicted (n=22, mean±se, *: p<0.05 vs placebo).](image-url)

![Fig. 3. - Effects of treatment with placebo (0), cromoglycate (4x2 mg) and budesonide (4x0.1 mg) on the provocation concentration of histamine producing a 20% fall in forced expiratory volume in one second (PC₂₀, histamine) (n=22, geometric mean+se, *: p<0.01 vs placebo, **: p<0.01 vs placebo).](image-url)

**Fig. 2** shows that the evening peak expiratory flow rate values after the first 3 weeks of treatment (p=0.02) and both the morning (p=0.01) and evening peak expiratory flow rate (p=0.03) after 6 weeks of treatment were significantly higher during treatment with budesonide than during treatment with placebo. Statistically, the evening peak expiratory flow rate values after the first 3 weeks of treatment (p=0.02) and both the morning (p=0.01) and evening peak expiratory flow rate (p=0.03) after 6 weeks of treatment were significantly higher during treatment with budesonide than during treatment with cromoglycate.

The use of rescue medication with a β₂-agonist was low throughout the study and was on average 1.38 inhalation-day⁻¹ during treatment with budesonide and 1.76 inhalations-day⁻¹ during treatment with cromoglycate. Statistically, the difference between the two active treatment periods was not significant. However, during the use of both these drugs rescue medication was used less frequently in comparison to the use of rescue medication during treatment with placebo (2.81 inhalations-day⁻¹, p<0.05).

Clinical assessment (table 3) was performed by the same investigator each visit. Complaints were less severe during the two active treatment periods than during the placebo periods. Nocturnal symptoms were minimal throughout the whole study and showed no significant differences between placebo and active drug treatment periods. Treatment with budesonide was significantly better than with cromoglycate after 3
With regard to patient compliance, an average of 15 inhalations-day⁻¹ of the study drugs was recorded by the patients throughout the study. Assessed by weighing the canisters, the average number of inhalations actually taken was 7.0 for cromoglycate and 7.4 for budesonide (88% and 93% of the number of inhalations prescribed). In only 4 of the 44 treatment periods was the use below 6 inhalations-day⁻¹.

Side-effects were reported by 10 of the 31 patients. In most cases these were mild complaints of cough, hoarseness and/or dyspnoea occurring shortly after the use of the trial metered-dose inhalers, lasting 10-30 min. In only one patient (No. 22) was it more than mild and in fact was enough reason to withdraw this patient during the first placebo period. Cough was mentioned by one patient throughout the study, but this was no reason for withdrawal. Hoarseness was reported by 2 patients during placebo, by 2 patients during treatment with cromoglycate and by 4 patients during treatment with budesonide. Dyspnoea after inhalation of the study drugs was reported by 4 patients during treatment with placebo, 3 patients during treatment with cromoglycate and one patient during treatment with budesonide. No significant differences were observed between the two active drug periods. Physical examination and pharyngeal swabs showed no abnormalities within these patients.

The patient's preference was assessed at the end of the study as no, slight or strong preference for a certain period. In 9 patients no preference could be assessed. In 7 patients there was a slight preference, 3 in favour of cromoglycate, 4 in favour of budesonide. Six patients mentioned a strong preference, all in favour of budesonide (p<0.05, Wilcoxon's signed rank test).

Discussion

In this study inhaled cromoglycate showed some improvement in symptom scores, evening peak expiratory flow rate and additional B₂-agonist use. Clinical assessment scores showed a decrease in day-time dyspnoea, cough and exercise-induced symptoms. However, baseline FEV₁ and the severity of bronchial hyperresponsiveness, as assessed by PE₂₀, histamine and...
the exercise-induced fall in FEV\textsubscript{1}, did not change.

Inhaled budesonide showed a more pronounced improvement of symptom scores and of both evening and morning peak expiratory flow rates. Additional \beta\textsubscript{2}-agonist use decreased, and clinical assessment scores showed fewer complaints. Treatment with budesonide, in contrast with cromoglycate, showed improvement of baseline FEV\textsubscript{1}, and a decrease in severity of bronchial hyperresponsiveness, as assessed by measuring both \textit{PC}_{20} histamine and exercise-induced fall in FEV\textsubscript{1}.

Inhaled cromoglycate given in a single dose prior to allergen exposure, prevents both early rapid phase and late phase bronchoconstriction [3]. Exercise-induced bronchoconstriction is largely prevented when inhaled cromoglycate is given prior to exercise [13]. However, no influence on histamine-induced bronchoconstriction was observed [14].

During the long-term treatment with cromoglycate in our study the patients were not allowed to use the morning dose of the study drug nor the rescue medication on the test day. The short-term prophylactic effects of cromoglycate had already been washed out by then [15]. If, however, the long-term treatment with cromoglycate had any effect on bronchial hyperresponsiveness, one would expect effects on histamine tolerance and possibly also on exercise-induced bronchoconstriction. However, no such effects were seen, which implies that the effects of cromoglycate are of short duration and the end-organ response is not modulated. A recent report [8] also showed no change in bronchial hyper responsiveness, as assessed by \textit{PC}_{20} histamine, during continuous treatment with cromoglycate in 48 adult asthmatic patients of whom 41 were also allergic, proved by skin prick tests.

Inhaled corticosteroids given in a single dose prior to allergen exposure mainly prevents the late phase bronchoconstriction [4, 5]. Inhaled corticosteroids showed no protection against bronchoconstriction when given immediately before histamine inhalation [16] or exercise [17].

The long-term treatment with inhaled corticosteroids in our study showed a clear change in bronchial hyperresponsiveness, expressed both by an increased histamine and exercise tolerance. Other studies have also shown effects on \textit{PC}_{20} histamine [10, 18] and exercise-induced bronchoconstriction [11]. Corticosteroids, but also cromoglycate, prevent late asthmatic responses and allergen-induced increases in airway responsiveness [3, 4, 19]. It is generally accepted that one of the effects of cromoglycate is to block the release of mediators from mast cells and therefore it seems to be a prophylactic medication and will probably only influence symptoms brought about by current allergen exposure, or mediator release caused otherwise. Corticosteroids by being non-specifically anti-inflammatory may improve airway hyperresponsiveness to some extent under all circumstances. Long-term treatment with inhaled corticosteroids also prevents early asthmatic responses [19]. These effects induced by corticosteroid treatment probably indicate both a mast cell stabilizing effect during long-term treatment and a modulation of the end-organ responsiveness due to anti-inflammatory effects in the bronchial mucosa [20]. With regard to the evaluation of the prophylactic aspects of action of corticosteroids treatment \textit{in vivo}, further studies are needed, i.e. to compare the protective effects of cromoglycate and inhaled corticosteroids on seasonal increases in airway responsiveness in patients who show no increased responsiveness out of season.

Three other studies have been published, in which treatment with inhaled cromoglycate was compared to treatment with inhaled corticosteroids. A study by 

Rask and Löwberg [21] compared cromoglycate 20 mg i.d. with budesonide 0.40 mg i.d. in adult patients with bronchial asthma without allergy. They reported some protective effects of both treatments on \textit{PC}_{20} histamine. A study by Svanes et al. [9] compared cromoglycate 2 mg q.i.d. with beclomethasone dipropionate 0.40 mg b.i.d. The inhaled corticosteroid proved to be effective on lung function (increase in FEV\textsubscript{1}) as well as \textit{PC}_{20} histamine (34% increase). In the first period, after 2 weeks of therapy, cromoglycate showed the same effect on \textit{PC}_{20} histamine as beclomethasone dipropionate, but not after 8 weeks of treatment. Cromoglycate showed no effect on \textit{PC}_{20} histamine when given as a second treatment. Because there was no wash out period between the active treatment periods, this study is difficult to interpret. The study by Østerbaard and Pedersen [22] compared inhaled cromoglycate and budesonide in the same dose as we used in our study, in children with bronchial asthma with allergy. They found no effects of cromoglycate on exercise-induced bronchoconstriction but a pronounced favourable effect of budesonide. In their study \textit{PC}_{20} histamine showed small, but statistically significant changes, without a significant difference between the two drugs.

Data are emerging to suggest that an increase in airway responsiveness induced by allergens can persist for days, weeks or even longer [7, 23]. The prognosis of patients suffering from bronchial asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) probably depends on the degree and the reversibility of airflow limitation [24-26] which in turn seem, at least in part, related to the degree of bronchial hyperresponsiveness [2]. Therefore, pharmacological treatment of patients with bronchial asthma and COPD should not only be directed at relieving actual bronchoconstriction, but also, if possible, at decreasing airway hyperresponsiveness.

The present study has shown clinically important anti-asthmatic effects and a decrease in bronchial hyperresponsiveness during treatment with inhaled budesonide, without serious side-effects occurring. These findings correspond with the patients' preference for treatment with budesonide. With regard to adrenal function, others have already shown that in normal dose e.g. 400 µg budesonide daily, as was used in this study, no such side-effect exists or seems to be important [32]. A relationship between symptoms and measurement of lung function and airway hyperresponsiveness has been observed [2, 27, 28]. It remains, however, difficult to
predict current symptoms of asthma from a measurement of airway hyperresponsiveness [29]. Patients can be hyperreactive without complaints or symptoms. Also the degree of hyperresponsiveness is related to the degree of airflow obstruction, but again patients can be hyperreactive without showing airflow limitation at a certain moment. Therefore, in the follow-up of asthmatic patients the recording of symptoms is of some value but this follow-up should at least include the measurement of lung function indices, not only FEV₁, but also peak expiratory flow rate which provides more reliable data due to the frequency of measurements [30], and preferably also measurement of airway hyperresponsiveness. The correlation between the degree of exercise-induced bronchoconstriction and of histamine/methacholine-induced bronchoconstriction is variable. Exercise-induced bronchoconstriction is usually more pronounced in the more severe asthmatic patients than in those with the lowest histamine/methacholine threshold [31]. In the present study the exercise-induced fall in FEV₁ was more than halved by the treatment with budesonide. This is undoubtedly of clinical importance, and appreciated by the patient. Compliance with therapy may also be better when the patient experiences changes induced by a certain drug in more physiological laboratory tests, e.g. an exercise test which can become negative, rather than in a test like the histamine provocation test. Using the latter test improvements can also be seen, but PC₂₀ histamine will seldom rise >8 mg·m⁻³. This indicates the importance of assessing the PC₂₀ histamine as a measurement of airway hyperresponsiveness and continuing disease. In exercise provocation, bronchoconstriction may still appear, it decreases, however, to a level of no clinical importance in most patients and therefore responsiveness to exercise is a very useful parameter to study the effects of pharmacological treatment of airway hyperresponsiveness.

Acknowledgements: Cromoglycate metered-dose inhalers and placebo inhalers of identical appearance were kindly provided by Pisons Ltd, Loughborough, UK. Budesonide metered-dose inhalers and placebo inhalers of identical appearance were kindly provided by Draco AB, Lund, Sweden.

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