

European Respiratory Society Annual Congress 2013

Abstract Number: 5098

Publication Number: P5121

Abstract Group: 1.5. Diffuse Parenchymal Lung Disease

Keyword 1: Interstitial lung disease **Keyword 2:** Treatments **Keyword 3:** Peripheral muscle

Title: Rituximab therapy for interstitial lung disease in patients with antisynthetase syndrome

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Body: Objective: To retrospectively analyze the response to Rituximab in patients with antisynthetase syndrome-related interstitial lung disease (ILD-ASS). Methods: Clinical and biological data, high resolution CT-scan features and pulmonary function tests were collected from medical records of all patients with ILD-ASS treated with rituximab at Respiratory Medicine Departments in 2 university hospitals, before rituximab infusion, and at 3 and 6 months post-treatment. Results: 8 non smokers patients, 37-68 yrs old (mean, 55 yrs) with anti Jo-1 (6/8), anti PL-7 or anti PL-12 antibodies (one each) were studied. All patients had been previously treated with corticosteroids and 5/8 had failed to respond to other immunosuppressants. 5 patients had myositis at the time of rituximab treatment. Rituximab was given as a 1000 mg infusion at week 0 and 2 (5 patients) or as a four weekly 375 mg / m² infusions (3 patients) and was well tolerated. During follow up, clinical and radiological improvement occurred in 6 and 7 patients respectively. The mean improvement of FVC was 16% and DLCO 19%. The mean increase of 6MWT was 21% (mean 64 meters). All patients were alive after a follow-up period of 6 months. Conclusions: Most patients (6/8) exhibited clinical, radiological and pulmonary functional improvement within the 3-6 months follow-up after rituximab. Our positive preliminary results suggest to perform further randomized studies to determinate the interest of rituximab as a first-line therapy in patients with ILD – ASS.