

# Intravesical Treatment for Overactive Bladder Refractory to Antimuscarinics

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## ABSTRACT

Overactive bladder (OAB) is a symptom syndrome characterized by urgency frequency with or without urgency incontinence. The pathophysiology of OAB may involve parasympathetic efferent activity or afferent nerves which cause detrusor overactivity (DO) and sensory urgency. The traditional medication for OAB is antimuscarinic agents which target the muscarinic receptors not only on detrusor muscles but also on the sensory afferent nerves of the bladder. Intravesical treatment to inhibit abnormal receptor expression or transmitter release in the sensory nerve terminals in the suburothelial space might provide good therapeutic effects in the treatment of refractory OAB. Intravesical administration of antimuscarinics such as oxybutynin and tolterodine has been shown effective in increasing bladder capacity and decreasing incontinence episodes in patients with OAB. However, the need of daily intermittent transurethral catheterization and short therapeutic duration limited its wide application. Intravesical resiniferatoxin (RTX) instillation and intravesical botulinum toxin A (BTX-A) injection are two treatment alternatives for refractory OAB and have been demonstrated to have long-term effects. RTX at low concentrations can decrease sensory urgency without influencing detrusor contractility. BTX-A, however, has a substantial effect on detrusor contractility resulting in a large postvoid residual after injections.

*Key words:* overactive bladder, intravesical treatment, urodynamics

## INTRODUCTION

Overactive bladder (OAB) is a symptom syndrome characterized by urgency frequency with or without urgency incontinence [1]. The prevalence of OAB has been estimated to be present in 16% of people in Europe and is highly prevalent in women [2]. In Taiwan, about 10% of men and women have symptoms suggestive of OAB [3]. The pathophysiology of OAB may involve parasympathetic efferent activity or afferent nerves which cause detrusor overactivity (DO) and sensory urgency. Patients may have spontaneous or provoked detrusor contractions during bladder filling phase or before bladder capacity is reached.

The traditional treatment for OAB is medication by an antimuscarinic agent such as oxybutynin, tolterodine, propiverine, trospium, solifenacin or duloxetine which targets the muscarinic receptors. Despite the development of new antimuscarinic agents, many patients are refractory to oral therapy [4] or cannot tolerate the oral antimuscarinics [5]. Recent investigations have revealed that muscarinic receptors, mAChRs, are present in the urothelium and suburothelial

sensory fibers as well as in the detrusor [6]. Acetylcholine (ACh) may mediate both sensory input as well as detrusor contractility. Activation of mAChRs located near the luminal surface of the bladder affects voiding functions via mechanisms involving adenosine triphosphate (ATP) and nitric oxide (NO) release, presumably from the urothelium, which in turn could act on bladder C-fiber afferent nerves to alter their firing properties. These findings suggest that urothelial-afferent nerve interactions can influence reflex voiding function [6]. The blockade of muscarinic receptors, possibly mediated by muscarinic 2 (M<sub>2</sub>) receptors residing in the urothelium, has been shown to affect bladder afferent fibers, challenging the traditional concept that antimuscarinic therapy involves M<sub>3</sub> receptor-mediated effects on detrusor smooth muscle [7].

## PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF OAB

Patients with neurogenic detrusor overactivity (NDO) or idiopathic DO (IDO) were found to have increased suburothelial expression of the vanilloid receptor, transient receptor potential vanilloid receptor subtype 1 (TRPV1) [8], purinergic receptor P2X<sub>3</sub> [9], sensory neuropeptides substance P and calcitonin gene-related peptide (CGRP) [10]. Increased density of suburothelial substance P and CGRP immunoreactive fibers were also found in women with IDO compared to controls [11]. The urothelial release of neurotransmitters such as ACh, ATP and the neuropeptide substance P, and the expression of TRPV1 and P2X<sub>3</sub> receptors strongly imply a role for the urothelium in human bladder mechanosensation [12-14]. Recent investigations also discovered a suburothelial nexus of myofibroblasts or interstitial cells may be the substrate for a stretch-receptor organ. These cells are extensively linked by gap junctions and may respond to ATP in a mode similar to the activation of ATP-gated P2Y receptors [15,16]. The urothelial release of ACh and ATP on bladder filling increases with ageing [12], implicating an abnormal release of these neurotransmitters in the pathophysiology of DO. In treatment of IDO with intravesical injections of botulinum toxin type A (BTX-A), decreased immunoreactivity of P2X<sub>3</sub> expression in suburothelial fibers was noted, which correlated with improvement in patients' sensation of urgency [11].

Based on results from recent investigations, OAB might have a pathophysiology in the abnormality of expression of sensory receptors or release of transmitters in the suburothelial nerves or interstitial cells [17]. In this regard, intravesical treatment to inhibit receptor expression or transmitter release in the sensory nerve terminals in the suburothelial space might provide good therapeutic effects in the treatment of sensory urgency and DO.

Intravesical agents for OAB have long been used in treatment of patients with neurogenic voiding dysfunction (NVD). Patients with severe NDO might develop large postvoid residual (PVR) after intravesical treatment and clean intermittent self-catheterization (CISC) might be necessary although they could regain continence or decrease epi-

sodes of urinary incontinence. Nevertheless, intravesical treatment has emerging an attractive alternative therapeutic modality for OAB refractory to conventional antimuscarinic agents.

### INTRAVESICAL ANTIMUSCARINICS OR LOCAL ANESTHETICS

Current reported agents used for intravesical treatment of refractory OAB include oxybutynin, trospium, atropine and lidocaine and bupivacaine. Intravesical oxybutynin has some local anesthetic effect in addition to blocking cholinergic transmission [18]. Intravesical oxybutynin is an effective and relatively safe option of therapy for OAB [19]. Oxybutynin can be absorbed from the bladder after intravesical administration. The serum concentrations of oxybutynin after single 5 mg intravesical instillation are at least as high as those reported after oral drug intake, but the parent drug/metabolite ratio is much higher after intravesical administration. The elimination of oxybutynin as well as its metabolite is prolonged after intravesical administration [20].

Intravesical administration of tolterodine significantly increased bladder capacity in vehicle treated rats with cerebral infarction but had no effect on the bladder capacity in resiniferatoxin (RTX) treated rats with cerebral infarction. The study demonstrated that intravesical tolterodine exerts an inhibitory effect on C-fiber bladder afferent nerves [21]. Another study investigating intravesical antimuscarinics on sensory and motor effects of rat bladder also demonstrated that the effects of antimuscarinics on OAB not only by suppression of muscarinic-mediated detrusor muscle contractions, but also by blocking muscarinic receptors in bladder afferent pathways [22].

An interesting study investigated the effects of intravesical cyclooxygenase-2 (COX-2) inhibitor on the expression of inducible nitric oxide synthase (iNOS) and nerve growth factor (NGF) in cyclophosphamide (CYP) induced OAB. In the COX-2 inhibitor-treated rats the contraction interval and intercontractile interval were significantly longer than in the OAB rats. In the OAB rats NGF activity in the mucosa and submucosa were increased, and there was greater expression of iNOS in all layers and NGF in detrusor. In the COX-2 inhibitor-treated rats, the expression was less in all layers. The study demonstrated intravesical instillation with COX-2 inhibitors can reduce CYP-induced bladder hyperactivity and expression of iNOS and NGF. This study provides evidence that OAB might be a chronic inflammatory process involving COX-2 and iNOS pathway and, therefore, intravesical instillation with COX-2 inhibitors can be considered as a promising treatment for refractory OAB [23].

Intravesical atropine and local anesthetic agents have been demonstrated to increase bladder capacity. In a study comparing intravesical atropine and oral oxybutynin for NDO revealed no significant difference in the changes of incontinence events and voiding frequency between two arms, but the changes in total side effect and dry mouth scores were significantly better in the atropine treatment arm [24]. However, the effect of intravesical atropine or local anesthetic is short-lived and is not considered suitable for clinical use [25]. The necessity of daily CISC and administering the agent also limit their use in treating refractory OAB. Therefore, searching for intravesical agents which have long-term effect on refractory OAB seems mandatory.

### INTRAVESICAL RESINIFERATOXIN

The vanilloid receptors TRPV1 participating in normal bladder function are essential for normal mechanically evoked purinergic signaling by the urothelium and is involved in ATP release [26]. In conditions of NDO and IDO, there is up-regulation of unmyelinated nerve fibers expressing vanilloid receptors [8]. Successful treatment with RTX for patients with DO depend on presence of over-expression of vanilloid receptors on the sensory fibers in the bladder [27]. Instillation of RTX can sensitize the vanilloid receptors on the sensitive fibers resulting in an acute excitatory response and the disappearance of spontaneous detrusor contractions during bladder filling later on [28]. In rat bladders pretreated with capsaicin to desensitize C-fiber afferent nerves, the excitatory effects of intravesical administration of the mAChR agonist oxotremorine methiodide, which were blocked by mAChR antagonist atropine methyl nitrate, were absent, suggesting that urothelial-afferent nerve interactions can influence reflex voiding function and the mechanisms involving ATP and NO release presumably from the urothelium [6].

Previous investigations in intravesical vanilloid therapy were aimed at treating NDO due to spinal cord lesions. Patients can regain continence, increase of bladder capacity and decrease of urinary incontinence after capsaicin or RTX instillations [29-31]. Only a few investigations have used capsaicin or resiniferatoxin to treat IDO or bladder hypersensitivity from non-spinal cord lesions [28,32]. As evidenced by positive ice water test results, over-expression and hyperactivity of the vanilloid receptors in the urinary bladder have been identified in patients with DO due to various non-spinal lesions [33]. Therefore, use of intravesical vanilloid agonists such as capsaicin or resiniferatoxin to treat OAB refractory to anticholinergic agents might be effective. However, the dose of RTX and the treatment regimen remain to be determined.

Previous studies have shown that intravesical capsaicin therapy exerts an excellent effect in patients with incontinence due to multiple sclerosis or spinal cord injuries [34-36]. High dose of capsaicin instillation might induce severe adverse events such as autonomic dysreflexia, bladder pain and hematuria. Because of its irritative effect, patients with non-spinal lesions might not be able to tolerate capsaicin therapy. RTX, an ultrapotent capsaicin analog, has been shown to have a clinical effect similar to capsaicin but with less neuronal excitatory effects [37]. Thus, RTX treatment is more suitable than capsaicin for patients who have normal bladder sensation and OAB [38].

The clinical effect of intravesical RTX at a concentration of 100 nM has been demonstrated in treating DO due to non-spinal cord lesions in patients refractory to anticholinergic treatment [39]. The magnitude of the neurotoxic effect of RTX seems to depend on the dose of vanilloids. A high concentration of resiniferatoxin might cause acute desensitization but might also result in neurotoxicity in the A-delta fibers mediating detrusor contractions, whereas a lower concentration might have less neurotoxicity and less desensitization of C-fibers. In order to achieve a better desensitization of C-fibers without neurotoxicity in the A-delta fibers, repeat treatment with a lower concentration of RTX might be necessary.

We have conducted a randomized, double-blind, placebo-controlled study of therapeutic effect of RTX on OAB recently. The results showed that four repeated installations of RTX at a concentration of 10 nM were well tolerated and effective in about 50% of patients with re-

fractory DO compared to the control group at 3 months after instillations [40]. Repeated instillations might lead to greater desensitization of afferent C-fibers and can provide a satisfactory therapeutic outcome in the majority of OAB patients [39,40].

### BTX-A INTRAVESICAL INJECTIONS

BTX-A was widely used in treatment of NDO due to spinal cord lesion and was reported to provide satisfactory results [41]. Detrusor underactivity developed after detrusor injection of 300 U of BTX-A and lasted for 9 months. Seventy-three percent of patients with neurogenic bladder resumed a continent condition after treatment [41]. Most of the patients treated with BTX-A for their neurogenic incontinence reported increase of quality of life and desired for repeated injection after the therapeutic effect had disappeared [42]. Achievement of urinary continence and an increase in bladder capacity seem promising, however, the results for patients with non-neurogenic DO were not as good as for those with NDO [43].

BTX-A can cause skeletal or smooth muscle paralysis by blocking ACh release at the neuromuscular junction [44]. Reduction of expression of P2X<sub>3</sub> and TRPV1 receptors on suburothelial sensory fibers has been observed in patients receiving detrusor BTX-A injections for DO and has been associated with reduction in the degree of urgency in patients with a successful therapeutic result [11]. An antinociceptive effect through a direct decrease in the amount of neuropeptides such as substance P and CGRP released from activated sensory neurons has been postulated to account for the clinical effectiveness of BTX-A in pain relief [44,45].

The dose of BTX-A in treatment of OAB or non-neurogenic DO has not been well established yet. In previous studies using BTX-A for IDO, most investigators used detrusor injections of 200 U or 300 U of Botox (Allergan, Irvine, USA). However, the reported therapeutic results varied greatly. Kessler et al treated 11 patients with IDO with detrusor injections of 300 U Botox and the maximal bladder capacity increased from 220 to 340 mL. However, four patients needed clean intermittent catheterization (CIC) due to large postvoid residuals [46]. Rajkumar et al treated 15 women with IDO with detrusor injections of 300 U Botox and 14 had improvement in urgency and frequency, the therapeutic effects lasted for 5-6 months [47]. Popat et al used 200 U Botox for 31 patients with IDO. Although significant improvement in bladder capacity was noted after treatment, 20% of the patients needed CIC [48]. Schulte-Baukloh et al used 300 U of Botox for detrusor and urethral injections in 7 women with OAB without DO. The bladder capacity increased by 20% and all patients could void without the need for CIC [49]. In the author's previous study, detrusor injections of 200 U Botox provided a 73% success rate in 30 IDO patients, with a mean therapeutic duration of 5.3 months [43]. Further study using suburothelial injections of Botox at a dose of 200 U revealed therapeutic results (85% success rate) as good as those achieved with 300 U Botox in other studies [50].

Although the original results of 200 U to 300 U of Botox for patients with IDO seems promising, high percentage of adverse events such as chronic urinary retention, large PVR, hematuria and urinary tract infection remain difficult problems to be solved [43,50]. Under this safety consideration, a dose reduction and mode of administration are necessary in order to achieve similar therapeutic effects and reduce adverse effects [50].

Recently, the dose of Botox for IDO was further reduced to 100 U by many investigators and a satisfactory outcome was still achieved. Werner et al treated 26 women with IDO with a 53% success rate [51]. Schmid et al treated 100 IDO patients with an 88% success rate [52]. However, the therapeutic effects of 100 U Botox need further clarification. A dose-related increase in adverse events has been found with increasing doses of BTX-A [53]. In a recent study report by the author, 35% of patients had urinary tract infection, 30% had a large PVR requiring CIC, and 75% had difficult urination after 100 U Botox injection [50]. This high incidence might prohibit patients receiving a second injection when their OAB symptomatic relapse. A 100 U dose of suburothelial Botox reduced the rates of urinary tract infection to 4.3%, a large PVR to 30.4%, and difficult urination to 56.5% [53]. Therefore, adjustment of the dose of BTX-A for patients with IDO seems mandatory to minimize de novo adverse events.

Because intravesical BTX-A injection might induce detrusor underactivity and cause undesired adverse events, limited injections of BTX-A at the bladder base and trigone instead of to the whole bladder has been suggested to achieve therapeutic effect and avoiding adverse events of difficult urination. The trigone and bladder base have been found to have abundant sensory fibers. The role of trigonal sensory fibers on bladder urgency sensation and DO has not yet been explored. Injections of BTX-A into these areas have been shown to have therapeutic effects on idiopathic urgency frequency syndrome and interstitial cystitis [54,55]. Although vesicoureteral reflux might be a potential complication after BTX-A in these areas, there is no evidence of it so far [55,56]. An advantage of bladder base and trigonal injections of BTX-A is that detrusor underactivity does not develop after treatment [55]. Therefore, bladder base and trigonal BTX-A injections might be used in treating patients who have OAB and impaired detrusor contractility.

### CONCLUSIONS

Strategies for treating OAB are aiming at the parasympathetic efferent and sensory afferent nerves in the bladder. The use of antimuscarinics is the first line treatment for OAB. In patients with OAB symptoms refractory to antimuscarinic therapy, the pathogenesis of OAB may be due to abnormality of sensory receptor expression on the sensory afferent nerves, and intravesical treatment targeting the sensory nerves will be effective. Intravesical administration of antimuscarinics and local anesthetics is effective in increasing bladder capacity, but the short-lived effect has limited its clinical use. Intravesical RTX instillation and intravesical BTX-A injection can reduce sensory receptor expression and desensitize the sensory fibers with long-term effect on OAB. RTX at low concentrations can decrease sensory urgency without influencing detrusor contractility. BTX-A, however, has a great effect on detrusor contractility, resulting in a large PVR after injection. Careful adjustment of dose and administering frequency may improve therapeutic effects and decrease adverse events. Although clinically effective, both RTX and BTX-A are still in clinical trial. Informed consent should be obtained before treatment.

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