

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus: To suffer or not to suffer?

Madam, autoimmune diseases are a class of disorders which result from a loss of self recognition by the immune system. They are more common in females and include conditions such as Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) and Rheumatoid Arthritis. They are responsible for considerable morbidity in the western world.¹ Up to 8% of the US population (22 million people) is affected by one of these disorders.² Although the epidemiological data for Asia and especially Pakistan is scarce, their prevalence rate in this region is comparable to that of the West.³

Systemic Lupus Erythematosus (SLE) is characterized by widespread tissue damage in the heart, lungs, skin, joints, liver, blood vessels, nervous system and kidneys. Complications include skin problems

patients that have signs or symptoms of SLE (or other autoimmune disease) either opt for self-medication, or go to a local hakeem or a general practitioner, who often misdiagnoses the disease. Wide-scale programmes (with Media support) are needed to promote awareness regarding this set of disorders in the public.

2) Laboratory tests for the detection of antibodies against various self-antigens are either not available at most labs, or are too expensive for the general public. Special rheumatological centers should be setup for prompt diagnosis and treatment.

Therefore, the government should take appropriate steps to create awareness among the people, as well as reduce the suffering that these diseases cause.

(rashes), glomerulonephritis, interstitial fibrosis of lungs and recurrent abortions with a propensity of complete heart block in newborns. Diagnosis is based on the history, examination, and a presence of Anti Nuclear Antibodies (ANAs), anti-dsDNA antibodies and/or anti-Smith Antibodies in the serum.⁴ Treatment is palliative, with immunosuppressives (eg azathioprine, methotrexate and cyclophosphamide), corticosteroids (eg prednisone) and hydroxychloroquine making the frontline therapy.⁵

Two things are of concern in our setup:

1) Majority of the general population does not consider autoimmune diseases as a separate entity, but rather classifies them as musculoskeletal disorders. Most

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