Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology
Volume 16 No. 3, July-September 2022
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/xxxxx/ijfmt.xxxx.16322.49

Metformin Versus Insulin in the Managment of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus

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How to cite this article: Nuha Muhsen, Sajda Al-Rubai, Huda Qahtan. Metformin Versus Insulin in the Managment of Gestational Diabetes Mellitus. Indian Journal of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology 2022;16(3):275-279.

Abstract

Background: *Insulin and metformin have been used extensively in the management of gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM). Insulin* has been the primary medical treatment if maternal glucose targets are not achieved by dietary therapy. Insulin is safe for the fetus, because it does not normally cross the placenta. *oral antidiabetic agents,* glibenclamide and metformin are the most studied agents to treat GDM patients.

Objective: To examine If oral metformln Is as effective as Insulin ln the prevention of fetal macrosomy ln pregnancies complicated with gestational diabetes mellitus.

Method: This study is an open -labeled prospective randomized controlled study that was carried out in Basra maternity-outpatient clinics in the tertiary level hospital ln Basra. One hundred women with GDM who did not attain euglycaemia with diet participated. Women were randomized to therapy with insulin n= 50 or oral metformin n=50. Incidence of macrosomia in infants and neonatal morbidity was measured.

Results: There were no statistically significant differences tn the incidence of macrosomia (16°/o versus 20°/o) , and neonatal morbidity between insulin and metformtn group. Around 15 (30°/o) of the metformin treated women needed supplemental insulin. They were more obese,(36.2 versus 30.6) kg/m2 bad higher fasting blood glucose level (7.4mmol/L versus 6.1 mmol/L) and needed medical treatment for GDM earlier (27 versus 32 wks) than women who were normoglycemic with metformin alone. There was a tendency to a higher rate of caesarean sections in the metformin group than in the insulin group.

Conclusion: Metformin seems to be suitable for the prevention of fetal macrosomia , especially in lean or moderately overweight women developing GDM in late pregnancy Women with considerable obesity, high fasting blood glucose and an early need for pharmacological treatment may be more suitable for insulin therapy.

Keywords: Metformin; Insulin; Gestational Diabetes.

Introduction

Basal and postprandial glucose metabolism is altered in pregnancy. During pregnancy eating causes stronger insulin secretion, but postprandial glucose concentrations are still higher than in non-pregnant individuals. Although fasting glucose is decreased,

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basal hepatic glucose production is increased, because hepatic insulin sensitivity and glucose suppression are reduced. This, in turn, leads to increased insulin production. Gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM) is classically defined as "a state of impaired glucose tolerance recognized during pregnancy in women not known to have had impaired glucose tolerance before pregnancy.[1]

Fasting glucose concentrations are higher in pregnancies complicated by GDM than in normal pregnancies, while basal hepatic glucose production is similar. Insulin sensitivity is lower in pregnancies of lean and obese GDM patients compared with normal pregnancies. Insulin resistance is increased by 40% in late pregnancy in patients with severe GDM compared with normal pregnancies.[2] GDM occurs when the pancreatic b-cells do not produce enough insulin to combat the increased insulin resistance. Obesity and chronic insulin resistance are the most common factors that predispose to b-cell dysfunction during pregnancy.

Insulin has been the primary medical treatment if maternal glucose targets are not achieved by dietary therapy. Insulin has several disadvantages since its use needs training, it is administrated by subcutaneous injections, it can cause hypoglycemia and it increases appetite and weight[3] However, oral antidiabetic agents, glibenclamide and metformin are the most studied agents to treat GDM patients. A meta-analysis of 6 studies with 395 GDM patients on metformin, 291 on glibenclamide and 702 on insulin reported no differences between the groups in terms of maternal fasting and postprandial glycemic control. The use of metformin or glibenclamide compared to insulin did not increase the rate of neonatal hypoglycemia, birth weight, incidence of LGA-babies or cesarean deliveries.[4]

According to the literatures, identification of high risk group (GDM) women and offering them oral metformin treatment could improve both the morbidity and mortality for the pregnant women and their fetuses in our community because most of our diabetic pregnant mothers are relactating for using subcutaneous insulin injections during their pregnancies. So our goal or our aim of the study was to investigate the efficacy of metformin in the prevention of fetal macrosomy and its influence on neonatal and maternal morbidity in women with GDM in comparison with insulin therapy.

Methodology

A target number of 100 women with GDM was obtained in the study from Basra maternity and children hospital. The gestational diabetes was diagnosed by measuring the concentration of serum blood glucose before breakfast and 1.5 hour of the main meals. The target concentration was < 5.3 mmol/L for fasting and > 6.7 mmol/L for postprandial glucose. The women with singleton pregnancies diagnosed with (GDM) between 12;34 week of gestation were asked to participate. The study were randomized to treatment with either metformin (n=50)or insulin (n=50).

Randomizations was achieved using numbered selected envelopes containing a randomization on e-generated manually in blocks of ten. Exclusion criteria were pre-eclampsia, essential hypertension requiring antihypertensive drugs. Metformin 850mg once daily for the first week, twice daily for the second week and three times daily from the third week onward. Medication was discontinued if significant side effect achieved or if normoglycemia was not achieved within 1-2 weeks and supplement. Insulin was added. While in second group, along acting insulin was used to normalize fasting and rapid-acting was used to normalize postprandial glucose concentration.

The women continue to measure the daily profiles of capillary glucose concentration twice a week. The women were followed at the outpatient maternity clinics of the hospital at 4 weeks intervals between 12-32 weeks of gestation, at 2 weeks intervals between 32-36 weeks of gestation and once or twice weekly after 36 weeks of gestation. The primary outcome was the incidence of macrosomia, and secondary outcome included neonatal complication such as admission to the neonatal intensive care unit, neonatal hypoglycemia requiring intravenous glucose treatment, hyperbillirubinaemia treated with phototherapy and birth injuries, the Apgar score in 1 and 5 minutes were recorded .

Maternal outcome included a need for supplemental insulin in the metformin group, incidence of premature delivery before 37 weeks of gestation, hypertensive complication of pregnancy, weight gain during pregnancy and mode of delivery. The significance of the difference between the groups studied was assessed by Chì-square test and t - tests as appropriate, statistical significant was defined as $p<0.05$, $p<0.01$, $p<0.001$.

Result

During the study period, 239 women were referred to the out patient clinics of the study hospital for the consideration of pharmacological treatment for GDM, 128 were eligible for the study and follow up till birth and only 100 of them can be followed and agreed to participate and were randomized in two equal group~ each of 50 patient. Table 1 shows the maternal baseline characteristics. The mean gestational age at delivery did not differ between the study group. There were no significant differences in the mean birth weight of the newborn, or in the macrosomia and neonatal complications as shown in Table 2.

There were no perinatal deaths in this trial, also the incidence of pregnancy complications did not differ between the two study groups, five women in both study groups had mild pre-eclampsia, while the incidence of caesarean section were significantly higher in the metformin group compared with the insulin group (P=0.04) Table 2, Around 15 out of 50 (30%) women randomized to metformin therapy did not reach normoglycemia and needed supplemental insulin. After starting supplemental insulin three of the women discontinued metformin because of its gastrointestinal side effects. The women needing supplemental insulin had greater BMI, high fasting glucose concentration and needed pharmacological treatment of earlier gestational age than women who were normoglycemic with metformin (Table 3).

Table 1: Maternal Baseline characteristics

Character	N=50	N=50	P
Age in year	33.l ± 5.1	33.6 ± 5.4	N.S
Parity	2.4 ± 1.2	2.1 ± 1.8	N.S
Nulliparous	16(32.0)	18(36)	N.S
BMI at the first antenatal visit	30.8 ± 1.2	32.2 ± 6.5	N.S
Fasting glucose serum level mmol/L	5.7 ±0.6	6.2 ±0.9	N.S
Length of gestational enrollment-WK	30.1 ± 3.2	30.2 ± 3.3	N.S
Education No%	6(122}%	5(10}%	N.S
HBA1c% at randomization	5.8±0.2	5.9 ±0.5	N.S

Data or means ± SDs or n (%)

Table 2: Neonatal Data and the Mode of Delivery

Character	N=50	N=50	P
Gestational age at delivery in WK	39.3 ± 1.1	38.4 ± 1.6	N.S
Macrosomia	8(16)%	10(20)%	N.S
Apgar score at			
lM)	7.2 ±0.3	7.6 ±0.7	N.S
SM)	8.9 ±0.7	9.0 ±0.6	N.S
Neonatal transferral to NICU	11(22)%	8(16}%	N.S
Neonatal hypoglycemia	8(16)%	6(12)%	N.S
Neonatal hyperbillirubinaemia	16(32)%	14(28)%	N.S
Spontenous V.O	21(42)%	34(68)%	(S)
Labour induction	25(50)%	22(44)%	N.S
c.s	11(22)%	19(38)%	0.001

Data or mean ± SDs or n (%)

Table 3: The Baseline Characteristics and Neonatal Outcomes in the Metformin Group

Character	M alone=35	M+l=15	P
BMI at the first antinatal visit	30.6 ± 1.4	36.2 ± 3.4	0.002
Fasting glucose serum level	6.1 ± 0.S	7.4 ± 1.2	0.001
G-estational age at randomization	32 ± 3.4	27 ± 6.2	0,001
Birth weight (g)ms	3923 ± 412	4179 ± 600	N.S
Macrosomic	8(16)%	10(20)%	N.S
Apgar score at			
1M	7.4 + 1.2	7.6 + 0.9	N.S
SM	9.3 + 0.7	9.1 + 1.2	N.S

Date or mean ± SD or n (%)

Relative risk in the metformin with supplemental insulin group compared with the metformin - only group.

Discussion

The prevalence of GDM has considerably increased in recent years. At the same time, the number of patients for whom lifestyle modification alone failed in achieving adequate postprandial glucose targets and, therefore, requiring drug therapy for GDM, also rose.[5] This development awakens interest in gaining more information on antidiabetic drug therapy in pregnancy, which was the focus of the present study. Glucose levels directly influence maternal and neonatal outcomes and even glucose values lower than normally diagnostic for diabetes seem to have an adverse effect, such that strict glycemic control is necessary. Several studies have been conducted comparing efficiency and tolerability of different antidiabetic gents, such as insulin and metformin.

Historically, insulin was used for GDM as it does not cross the placenta (from maternal to fetal circulation)[6], and due to the fact that only limited data on oral antidiabetics were available. Insulin was the most often prescribed agent in GDM. However insulin holds several disadvantages, such as the requirement of intensive educational instruction at the beginning of therapy, it's subcutanous application, the necessity of ideal storage conditions, close and frequent stringent blood glucose monitoring as well as the fact that it is much costlier than oral metformin, therefore, patients prefer metformin to insulin[7], moreover oral metformin have a good compatibility with pregnancy, for example, in various studies the metformin discontinuation rate was found to range between just 2 and 6% and this was mainly due to intolerable gastrointestinal side effect.[5,7,8]

Our study was randomized controlled study showed that metformin is a safe and clinically relevant medical alternative for treating GDM, the incidence of adverse pregnancy or neonate outcomes was not increased with metformin compared with women treated with insulin. Metformin was found to be especially suitable for lean and moderately overweight women with postprandial hyperglycemia in the later half of pregnancy. The mean birth weight of the newborns did not differ significantly between the metformin and insulin groups, which is in line with both earlier cohort studies and a prospective study (MIG trail)[9], in our study the incidence of birth weight over 4000GM was 20% in the metformin and 16% in insulin group which was less than the figures of 26.8% in study in Finland 2008.[10]

ln our study the frequency of neonatal hypoglycemia, neonatal hyperbillirubinaemia and the need for treatment in NICU was slightly but not significantly higher in the insulin group, which is in line with one but not all previous studies in the MIG trial which found that the incidence of sever neonatal hypoglycemia was significantly higher in the insulin treated group than in the metformin treated group.[11] Although metformin crosses the placenta leading to concentration similar to those present in maternal clrculation, it neither increase the rate of congenital malformations nor harms fetal or neonatal growth, however it has advantages such as significantly lower incidence of neonatal hypoglycemia and maternal pre-eclampsia and fewer neonata~missio~ to the NICU than in the insulin group.?"

Other benefits appear to include a reduced rate of macrosomia which is probably responsible for a reduction in the number of cesarean deliveries. While in our study the cesarean section rate (38%) was more than that in the insulin group, and it may be attributed to increase incidence of macrosomia. ln this study 30% of the women on metformin required additional insulin to reach normoglycemia. ln the MIG trial[12], the proportion of the metformin treated women requiring supplemental insulin was even higher 46.3% by contrast,, in the two retrospective studies only 18 and 13% of the women needed additional insulin[13], this may have resulted from patient selection.

Women with a need for supplement insulin in our study were more obese, had higher fasting blood glucose concentrations and needed medical treatment earlier than women who reached normoglycemia with metformin suggesting that they exhibited a more sever insulin resistance. They also needed higher insulin doses to reach normoglycemia than the women in the insulin group. Newborns in the supplemental insulin group had significantly higher mean birth weight when compared with the metformin only group, but the differences did not reach statistical significance probably because of the small sample size. lt is possible that women needing supplemenlal insulin had more sever disturbance in their glucose metabolism.

The glycemic level in those women was also unsatisfactory over a longer period, which is supposed to accelerate the growth of the fetus before reaching normoglycemia.so in summary, our) study was the first that confirmed in basra that GDM treated with /' metformin can be safe and effective alternative to insulin and that it is especially suitable for women with mild GDM. ln cases with severe disease determined by early diagnosis, fasting hyperglycemia and significant obesity promptly initiated insulin treatment seems to be a more optimal choice. Although it will be the task of future follow up studies to asses the possible differences in childhood between children exposed to metformin and those exposed to insulin in utero,which might lead to further changes in prescription manner in GDM.

Ethical clearance: Taken from Basrah Teaching Hospital, Basrah, Iraq

Source of funding: Self

Conflict of Interest: None

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