

Carolina Lupus Study Newsletter

December 2000

Season's Greetings to the Carolina Lupus Study Participants and Physicians

We have made tremendous progress in the analysis of data collected from the Carolina Lupus Study. We submitted our first paper in August on the risk of developing lupus in relation to allergies, infections, and other medical conditions. This work was described in our last newsletter - if you need another copy or want more information, please call us at our toll-free number (see below) or check out our web site at http://dir.niehs.nih.gov/direb/clu/home_clu.htm.

We also presented three posters at this year's annual meeting of the American College of Rheumatology in Philadelphia. These posters covered new topics that we are exploring with the data from the study: 1) reproductive and hormonal risk factors for the development of lupus; 2) occupational and agricultural exposure to silica dust and the development of lupus; and 3) differences by race, sex, and age in the symptoms experienced by lupus patients. The first of these analyses is described in more detail on the back of this newsletter. Summaries of the posters can be found on our web site, or call and we will send you a copy.

Here's some Staff News:

Our two North Carolina interviewers, Alesia Sanyika and Gwen McKoy, are working with us on various studies. You may have heard from them as we try to keep up with your addresses. Study Manager Lyle Lansdell is still working at CODA and helping us transition to our new study manager, (Ms.) Glenn Heartwell. She can be reached at the same number with a different extension: 1-800-948-7552 Extension 327.

Sara Graham, our interviewer in South Carolina, says she is on an extended hiatus from work. She has recently moved and is busy settling into her new home and country living. Sara also enjoys and stays busy with her grandchildren.

Expect to get a letter from us after the holidays giving you more details about our Year 2001 Follow-Up Study. We will be asking you to do a telephone interview to update changes in your health and work situation since the last interview.

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**Poster Presentation at the 2000 Annual Scientific Meeting
of the American College of Rheumatology in Philadelphia:**

**"Reproductive and Hormonal Risk Factors for the Development
of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus."**

Glinda S. Cooper, Mary Anne Dooley, Edward L. Treadwell, Bill St. Clair, Gary S. Gilkeson.

At least 85% of patients with lupus are female. Experimental studies in mice have shown that a lupus-like disease can be worsened by estrogen and prolactin. Estrogen is the female hormone that is produced by the ovaries, and prolactin is one of the hormones that increases substantially during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Estrogen levels increase when menstrual cycles begin (menarche) and decrease when menstrual cycles end (menopause). We examined pregnancy history, use of hormone-containing medications, and markers of estrogen and prolactin exposure (age at menarche, age at menopause, and history of breastfeeding) in women in relation to risk of developing lupus in order to determine whether these experiences could help explain why some women develop lupus and other women do not.

What did we find? Breastfeeding was associated with a decreased risk of developing lupus. That is, women who had breastfed at least one baby were less likely to develop lupus than women who had not breastfed. There was a statistically significant trend associated with the number of babies breastfed and total weeks of breastfeeding. However, the number of pregnancies or births that a woman had was not related to the risk of developing lupus. We also did not see any relationship between use of oral contraceptives, fertility drugs, other hormones, or hormone replacement therapy (a treatment for menopausal symptoms) and risk of lupus.

Thus, we found little evidence that estrogen-related or prolactin-related exposures are associated with an increased risk of lupus. The reduced risk of lupus we observed among women who had breastfed one or more babies was unexpected but intriguing, and should be examined in other studies.

We appreciate the calls you have made to inform us of changes in your contact information. We enjoy hearing from you, so please continue to call on our toll-free 800 number to keep us informed.

We will continue to let you know about what we learn from our study. Also be sure to check our web site for study updates.

Thank you again for all of your help!
