Cognitive dysfunction in women with chronic fatigue syndrome
Examining the role of the endometrium, the nuclear receptors, and the antimicrobial peptides

Amy Prol, Dept of Biology, Georgetown University

Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME) has recently been recognized by the CDC as a physiological disease that leaves patients substantially debilitated. Increasing evidence, including data from twin studies [1], points to the fact that patients with the illness also suffer from a significant degree of cognitive dysfunction - impairing their ability to process information and recall verbal and visual information [2]. We present data from a large cohort of CFS/ME patients in a study of a VDR nuclear receptor agonist, which suggest that women with CFS/ME tend to suffer from a greater decline in cognitive function than their male counterparts, and that cognitive function is at least partly restored by the agonist. The cognitive function of five women is examined in greater detail. For example, after falling ill with CFS/ME, one 45-year-old female went from being a corporate executive to reading at a 4th grade level. She became too confused to drive, lost her short-term memory, and forgot words, grammar, and basic math. Another patient was a corporate attorney who, after falling ill with CFS/ME, found that her reading skills fell to an 8th grade level. She lost the ability to solve problems and could not get beyond the first set of questions on an IQ test. In view of the recent report that the VDR nuclear receptor is over-expressed in the endometrium [3], it is possible that the severity of cognitive dysfunction among women may not be due to chance and that there is need for future research into gene expression in the endometrium.


VDR blockage causes 1,25(OH)2D3 to rise and interfere with the feedback pathways controlled by the nuclear receptors.

"...All one can say definitively, at this point, is that the vitamin D metabolites will competitively displace cortisol and T3 from these nuclear receptors."


Many nuclear receptors control the expression of families of antimicrobial peptides

"For example, the glucocorticoid receptor, RXRalpha, androgen receptor, Vitamin D Receptor, and T3R-alpha seem to be involved in control of 20, 18, 17, 16 and 15 families respectively, out of 22 analyzed."


In women, does the fluctuation of nuclear receptor expression during menstruation and pregnancy offer pathogens an advantage?

"The expression of androgen receptor, estrogen receptors alpha and beta, progesterone receptor, and RXRalpha followed cyclic A expression. There was more abundant expression in the proliferative phase endometrium than in the secretory phase endometrium."


There is proof of concept that bacterial ligands can block the Vitamin D Receptor.

Bacterial caprine docked into the ligand-binding pocket of the VDR, acting as an antagonist.

Because the VDR is over-expressed in the endometrium, are women disproportionately affected by the negative effects of VDR blockage?

Could the suppression of innate immunity allow pathogens to infect the brain with greater ease?