

Chronic mycoplasmal infections in Gulf War veterans' children and autism patients

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Abstract

Autism patients have systemic bacterial, viral and fungal infections that may play an important part in their illnesses. We found that immediate family members of veterans diagnosed with Gulf War Illnesses (GWI) often complain of fatigue and other problems, and upon analysis they report similar signs and symptoms as their veteran family members, except that their children are often diagnosed with Autism. Since a relatively common finding in GWI patients is a bacterial infection due to *Mycoplasma fermentans*, we examined military families (149 patients: 42 veterans, 40 spouses, 32 other relatives and 35 children with at least one family complaint of illness) selected from a group of 110 veterans with GWI who tested positive (~42%) for mycoplasmal infections. Consistent with previous results, over 80% of GWI patients who were positive for blood mycoplasmal infections had only one Mycoplasma species, *M. fermentans*. In healthy control subjects the incidence of any mycoplasmal infection was ~8.5% and none were found to have multiple mycoplasmal species ($P < 0.001$). In 107 family members of mycoplasma-positive GWI patients there were 57 patients (53%) that had essentially the same signs and symptoms as the veterans and were diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS/ME) and/or Fibromyalgia Syndrome. The majority of children ($n=35$) in this group were diagnosed with Autism. Most of these CFS or Autism patients also had mycoplasmal infections compared to the few non-symptomatic family members ($P < 0.001$), and the most common species found was *M. fermentans*. In contrast, in the few non-symptomatic family members that tested mycoplasma-positive, the *Mycoplasma* species were usually different from the species found in the GWI patients. The results suggest that a subset of GWI patients have mycoplasmal infections, and these infections can be transmitted to immediate family members who subsequently display similar signs and symptoms, except for their children who are often diagnosed with Autism. In a separate study in Central California we examined a group of Autism patients and also found a high incidence of mycoplasmal infections, but in contrast to the military families a variety of *Mycoplasma* species were detected.

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