Urinary C peptide creatinine ratio in pregnant women with normal glucose tolerance and type 1 diabetes: evidence for insulin secretion

Ankica Markoska, Rajalakshmi Valaiyapathi, Chloe Thorn, Anne Dornhorst

ABSTRACT

Hypothesis: In pregnancy, urinary C peptide creatinine ratio (UCPCR) reflects endogenous insulin secretion in women with normal glucose tolerance and type 1 diabetes.

Research design and methods: UCPCR and serum C peptide were measured in 90 glucose-tolerant women at 0 and 120 min during a 75 g oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT) at 28 weeks of gestation. UCPCR was measured in 2 samples obtained over 10 weeks apart in 7 pregnant women with longstanding type 1 diabetes.

Results: UCPCR_{OGTT} and serum C peptide_{OGTT} of glucose-tolerant women were significantly correlated at 0 and 120 min (r=0.675, 0.541 respectively, p<0.0001). All 7 pregnant women with type 1 diabetes had detectable first sample UCPCR (median (range) 49 (6–1038) pmol/mmol) that rose in 6 women by 477 (29–1491) pmol/mmol.

Conclusions: Detectable UCPCR in pregnant women with normal glucose tolerance and type 1 diabetes is likely to reflect endogenous insulin secretion and hence β-cell activity.

INTRODUCTION

Autopsy studies have suggested β-cell proliferation and neogenesis in human pregnancies, possibly due to placental factors. Three studies involving a total of 55 women with type 1 diabetes measured serum or plasma C peptide in pregnancy, showing 49 women to have detectable C peptide values. The ratio of urinary C peptide to the urinary creatinine obtained from a spot urine sample and expressed as UCPCR is correlated to serum C peptide outside pregnancy and has been used to assess residual β-cell function in women with type 1 diabetes. The current study investigated the use of UCPCR to assess β-cell function in pregnant women with normal glucose tolerance and with type 1 diabetes.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

This prospective study carried out at Queen Charlotte’s Hospital was ethically approved by the Imperial College Healthcare Tissue Bank and the Research Ethics Committee Wales: 12/WA/0196. All women gave informed written consent.

One hundred women were recruited prospectively to provide an extra blood and urine sample during a diagnostic 75 g oral glucose tolerance test (OGTT) at 28 weeks of pregnancy for gestational diabetes mellitus (GDM). All women had one or more risk factors for GDM according to the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines, or were 35 years old or above. All women were fasted for 8–10 hours and had passed their first void morning urine.

Blood samples were collected at 0 (fasting) and 120 min (post-75 g OGTT) in 6 ml BD plastic Vacutainer Plus, silicone coated tubes, placed on ice prior to separation of serum by centrifugation. The second void urine samples at 0 and the 120 min urine sample were collected in 30 ml polystyrene universal containers with boric acid preservative. Serum and urine samples were transferred to cryotubes and stored at ~80°C before analysis. Seven women with previously diagnosed type 1 diabetes were recruited to give a non-
fasting spot urine sample in the antenatal clinic on two separate occasions. All seven women gave urine samples that ranged from 10 to 22 weeks apart (five women between the first and third trimester, one between the first and second and one between the second and third trimester). Urine samples were handled as described above.

Urine and serum C peptide was measured by a two-step chemiluminescent microparticle immunoassay using an Abbott Diagnostics Architect platform, with a total coefficient of variation (CV) <10% and a detection range of 3.33–10 000 pmol/L for undiluted samples. Initially urinary c peptide measurements, including those of the seven women with type 1 diabetes, were analyzed undiluted. Samples exceeding the upper limit of detection were rerun following an automated 1:10 dilution using the validated Abbott protein containing diluent. Samples still exceeding the upper limit of detection were rerun following a manual 1:20 dilution using the manufactures’ multiassay manual diluent. Creatinine was measured using the kinetic alkaline picrate method with a total CV of ≤6% (Abbott Architect ci16200 system). The estimated glomerular filtration rate (eGFR) was estimated by the Modification of Diet in Renal Disease (MDRD) formula.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS V.22. Correlations between UCPCR_{OGTT} and serum C peptide_{OGTT} at 0 and 120 min for the glucose-tolerant women were performed by Spearman’s rank correlation.

RESULTS

Of the 100 women who had an OGTT, 90 were included for analysis; excluded were 5 women with GDM by NICE criteria,2 2 with non-singleton pregnancies, 2 with a gestational age above 31 weeks and 1 with a renal transplant.

The undiluted OGTT urinary samples were above the upper limit of the C peptide assay detection in 65 of the fasting and in all 90 of the 120 min samples. Following an automated 1:10 dilution, 17 of the 120 min samples remained above the upper range of assay detection. A 1:20 manual dilution was performed on these 17 samples; however, due to technical difficulties during the subsequent analysis and multiple freeze–thaw cycles, these samples were discarded.9 Therefore, the analysis of 120 min UCPCR data was performed on the remaining 73 samples.

The 90 glucose-tolerant women had a median age (range) of 34 (20–49) years, booking body mass index (BMI) of 23.7 (17.96–39.49) kg/m\(^2\) and a gestational age of 28 (24–29) weeks. The 0 and 120 min serum C peptide_{OGTT} median (25th–75th range) was 483 (381–599) and 2254 (1759–2781) pmol/L, respectively. The UCPCR_{OGTT} at 0 and 120 min median (25th–75th range) were 2796 (1969–3983) and 12304 (8621–20733) pmol/mmol, respectively. The UCPCR_{OGTT} and serum C peptide_{OGTT} were significantly correlated at 0
with type 1 diabetes with over 5 years duration is 20 (0–400) pmol/μmol. These ranges for UCPCR of non-pregnant women are approximately a fifth lower than those seen for the second urine sample among the seven pregnant women with type 1 diabetes, median (range) 650 (27.5–2250) pmol/μmol, with three women having a UCPCR value >1000 pmol/μmol. However, it has to be recognized that the UCPCR measurements in the current study were performed on undiluted urine that is standard practice in our laboratory for studies in type 1 diabetes. The use of undiluted 24 hours urinary collections has been validated for assaying low C peptide concentrations using the same assay methodology.

Three separate studies in pregnant women with type 1 diabetes have examined circulating C peptide, reporting it either becomes detectable for the first time in pregnancy or increases during pregnancy in some women. Our findings of detectable UCPCR in pregnancy in a small group of women with longstanding type 1 diabetes suggests that using UCPCR in pregnancy might be a suitable methodology for studying pregnancy-induced β-cell regeneration or neogenesis in humans.

There are subtle clinical pointers that pregnancy is related to either β-cell regeneration or neogenesis in women with type 1 diabetes having increased endogenous bioactive insulin secretion. In early pregnancy, there is a decrease of exogenous insulin requirement, and throughout pregnancy a lower than expected incidence of diabetic ketoacidosis despite a fall in serum bicarbonate levels and accelerated maternal lipolysis and ketosis in later pregnancy.

The possibility that residual β-cells in non-pregnant individuals with type 1 diabetes may emerge from neogenesis of pancreatic ductal cells has been suggested. Somatolactogenic hormones and hyperglycemia have been implicated in the enlargement of the pancreatic islets and β-cell induction and proliferation seen in rodents.

The β-cell adaptation due to neogenesis from other pancreatic cell types, forming new small islets rather than hyperplasia, has been proposed to occur in human pregnancy. Pregnancy-related factors capable of neogenesis of the human β-cells could have therapeutic implications for the future treatment of type 1 diabetes.

In summary, this study demonstrated that UCPCR provides a robust and practical means for assessing insulin secretion during pregnancy, and provides a practical methodology to assess in future studies the potential for β-cell adaptation in women with type 1 diabetes.

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Contributors AM designed and conducted the study, analyzed the data, interpreted the results and wrote the manuscript. RV and CT contributed to the conduct of the study and data analysis. AD is the guarantor of this work and, as such, had full access to all the data in the study and takes responsibility for the integrity of the data and the accuracy of the analysis.
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Competing interests None declared.

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