Clot Comes Out of the Closet: VTE in the Spotlight

By Alice Ma, MD

Each year, an estimated 600,000 Americans will suffer a deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolus (PE), of which nearly half will be fatal. Thus, venous thromboembolism (VTE) kills more people in the United States than AIDS, breast cancer, and highway crashes combined. Despite its enormous impact on mortality and morbidity, awareness of and advocacy for VTE has lagged, with a recent study showing that 74 percent of adults have no awareness of this condition. Increasing public awareness and prevention of VTE has been an uphill fight, led by patients and families, advocacy groups, public health officials, researchers, and clinicians.

Several events have marked a turning point in the battle against VTE. In 2005, Senate Resolution 56 was passed, making March National DVT Awareness Month. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has provided funds to five "pilot" hemostasis and thrombosis centers to determine the best way to provide treatment and preventive care to people with thrombosis or thrombophilia and to promote collaborative research on thrombosis. These centers have multi-disciplinary teams of health-care specialists, state-of-the-art clinical research programs, and outreach and education programs for patients. Additionally, the CDC has recognized the need for public awareness and healthcare provider education in this area, and has just awarded a grant to support these goals to the National Alliance for Thrombosis and Thrombophilia (NATT). NATT is a community-based, volunteer patient advocacy group dedicated to the prevention and treatment of the array of major health problems caused by blood clots. NATT recently participated in a workshop on DVT and PE convened by the Surgeon General's office which is expected to lead to a national Call to Action on VTE.

Today at 2:00 p.m., a one-time Special Educational Symposium on Thrombosis in the Elderly will be presented, emphasizing the importance of VTE in this age group. Dr. Mary Cushman will present recent epidemiologic data from the Longitudinal Investigation of Thromboembolism Etiology (LITE) study. Dr. Charles Esmon will speak to what is currently known about the age-related changes in cellular and molecular mechanisms underlying hemostasis and thrombosis. Dr. William Erschler will discuss aspects of health-care delivery and health-services research specifically related to elderly populations, and Dr. Kenneth Bauer will address specific problems faced by clinicians when diagnosing, treating, offering prophylaxis, or designing clinical research for elderly patients.

At 4:00 p.m., another one-time Special Session will present the problem of VTE from a number of different perspectives. Melanie Bloom, the spokesperson for the Coalition to Prevent DVT, will present the view of the patient and family member. Ms. Bloom's late husband, David Bloom, was a reporter embedded in a unit in Iraq when he suffered a fatal pulmonary embolism. Tanja Popovic, from the CDC, will present the public health view. Jeffrey Weitz, MD, from Hamilton, Ontario, and David Ginsburg, MD, from the University of Michigan, will be providing an update on the latest developments in clinical and basic research in venous thrombosis.

These sessions are expected to be two highly informative and interesting special sessions, discussing in detail the human, public health, scientific, and upcoming health policy aspects of the problems caused by venous thromboembolism and assuring that the spotlight will continue to shine on this important topic.

Attendees especially interested in thrombosis are encouraged to attend the Education Session on Thrombosis and Bleeding in Malignant Hematology Disorders offered today and tomorrow at 7:30 a.m. The Education Session on Thrombophilia is offered today at 9:30 a.m. and tomorrow at 7:30 a.m. There is an Education Spotlight Session on Thrombosis Prevention and Management in High-Risk Situations offered Monday at 11:00 a.m. (A ticket is required.) The role of thrombosis in the pathogenesis of hemolytic anemias will be covered in the educational session on RBCs and Hemoglobinopathies offered today at 7:30 a.m. and tomorrow at 9:30 a.m. Lastly, the role of hypercoagulability in sickle cell anemia will be discussed in the Education Session on Sickle Cell Anemia offered today at 9:30 a.m. and tomorrow at 7:30 a.m.