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Incidence of adrenal insufficiency and its relation to mortality in patients with septic shock

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Background: The hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis has a pivotal role in combating acute insults.

Glucocorticoids play a role directly or indirectly in the maintenance of normal vascular tone and in potentiating the vasoconstrictor action of catecholamine, associated with septic shock.

Aims: To determine the incidence of adrenal insufficiency and its relation to mortality in patients with septic shock.

Settings and Design: A prospective observational study done at tertiary care center.

Methods and Materials: In patients of septic shock, APACHE II score was calculated and serum cortisol was measured at the time of admission and 1 hour after giving 250 µg ACTH. Hydrocortisone was added to inotropics in all patients after drawing 2nd blood sample for serum cortisol and was continued till 7 days or less.

Results: The incidence of adrenal insufficiency (AI) in septic shock was (N=100) was 42% (in absolute 14%, relative 28%). The incidence of AI in septic shock was 42% (absolute 14%, relative 28%). The mortality rate was 48%, and it was higher in patients with AI than in patients without AI (P = 0.017).

Conclusions: AI is prevalent among patients with septic shock. We found that higher APACHE scores were associated with higher rates of adrenal failure and mortality in patients with septic shock. There also appears to be a bimodal distribution of mortality with adrenal status in patients with septic shock.