### The effect of the dopamine agonist, apomorphine, on regional cerebral blood flow in normal volunteers

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SYNOPSIS Apomorphine, a non-selective dopamine agonist, has been used as a pharmacological probe for investigating central dopaminergic neurotransmission in psychiatric illness. In this study repeated measurements of regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) were made in normal volunteers before, and after, the administration of apomorphine (5 or  $10 \mu g/kg$ ), or placebo. The difference in rCBF, before and after drug (apomorphine *versus* placebo), was used to identify brain areas affected by apomorphine. Compared to placebo, both doses of apomorphine increased blood flow in the anterior cingulate cortex. Apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg$  also increased prefrontal rCBF (right > left). No decreases in rCBF were noted following either dose of apomorphine. Apomorphine-induced increases of anterior cingulate blood flow might serve as an *in vivo* index of central dopamine function. Such an approach would complement established neuroendocrine challenge paradigms for investigating central dopamine neurotransmission in psychiatric illness.

#### INTRODUCTION

Apomorphine is a non-selective dopamine agonist with central and peripheral actions (Anden et al. 1967; Corsini et al. 1981; Creese, 1987). It has been extensively used as a pharmacological probe of dopaminergic systems in both normal volunteers and psychiatric patients (Checkley, 1980; Meltzer et al. 1984). In neuro-endocrine challenge paradigms apomorphine-induced increases in plasma growth hormone are used as an index of central dopamine receptor function (Checkley, 1980; Lal, 1987). Recently, an enhanced growth hormone response to apomorphine has been reported to be predictive of women at high risk of affective psychosis after childbirth (Wieck et al. 1991).

Despite considerable experimental data on apomorphine's central effects in animals, little is known about the brain areas targeted, functionally, by apomorphine in humans. The use of positron emission tomography (PET) to measure drug-induced changes in regional cerebral blood

Using positron emission tomography (PET) we report the effects on rCBF of single subcutaneous doses of apomorphine (5 and  $10 \mu g/kg$ ) in normal volunteers. Our aims were to determine: (1) the brain areas altered by apomorphine administration, as indexed by changes in rCBF; and (2) whether the pattern of rCBF change was consistent with the known distribution of central ascending dopaminergic projections and receptors.

#### **METHOD**

#### **Subjects**

Eighteen right-handed male volunteers (age range 25–36 years) took part in the study which was approved by the Hammersmith Hospital Ethics Committee and the Advisory Committee

flow (rCBF) is potentially a powerful approach to determine brain systems affected by centrally active drugs. Regional cerebral blood flow measurement is, under most circumstances, a valid index of neuronal activity *in vivo* and, in addition, is sensitive to physiological/behavioural challenges (McCulloch, 1982; Raichle, 1987; Posner *et al.* 1988).

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#### Drug administration

Each subject underwent six PET measurements of rCBF over an 80 min period. Two measurements of rCBF were undertaken before (t = -12, -2 min), and four measurements after (t = +15, +25, +45 and +55 min) subcutaneous apomorphine 5,  $10 \mu g/kg$  or placebo (water for injections). Scan times post apomorphine were chosen on the basis of apomorphine kinetics and the induction of centrally mediated neuroendocrine responses. Time to peak plasma concentration following subcutaneous apomorphine is approximately 8 min with an estimated elimination half-life of approximately 34 min (Gancher et al. 1989). Increases of plasma growth hormone begin approximately 15 min following apomorphine  $5 \mu g/kg$  injection subcutaneously and reach a maximum at approximately 60 min (Costain et al. 1982). Subjects were blind to the drug administered. Twelve subjects received apomorphine, six subjects received placebo.

#### Experimental design

Subjects performed memory tasks during PET scanning. Such standardization of behavioural state may allow for a reduction in intra- and inter-subject variability in rCBF (Duara et al. 1987). The behavioural state used for this study was a subspan memory task performed during the 1st, 3rd and 5th scan. A memory task was chosen as the reported experiment formed part of a larger study investigating interactions between monoaminergic drugs and memory processes (Friston et al. 1992). Subjects were asked to remember and immediately recall a series of five-word lists presented auditorily. Nine five-word lists were presented over the two minutes of the PET acquisition scan. Words were presented at the rate of one word every two seconds. Words were high frequency, concrete, imageable and were taken from the Oxford Psycholinguistic Data Base (Quinlan, 1992). In this paper the effect of apomorphine on rCBF under the subspan task alone is reported. A more complex memory task was performed during the 2nd, 4th and 6th scans; the effects of this task and apomorphine-memory task interactions on rCBF will be reported separately (see

Friston *et al.* 1992 for a preliminary report). Apomorphine or placebo was given after the 2nd scan. Subjects' eyes were closed throughout scanning.

#### PET scanning

Scans were obtained using a CTI model 931-08/12 PET scanner (CTI, Knoxville, TN, USA) (Spinks et al. 1988). Scans were reconstructed using a Hanning filter with a cut-off frequency of 0.5 giving a transaxial resolution of 8.5 mm full width at half maximum and an axial resolution of 6.75 mm for each of 15 transverse planes with a resulting total field of view of 10.13 cm in this direction. To index rCBF, subjects inhaled trace amounts of C<sup>15</sup>O<sub>2</sub>, mixed with air, at a concentration of 6 MBq/ml and a flow rate of 500 ml/min through a disposable oxygen face mask for a period of 2 min. Two PET scans were collected over a period of 2.5 min beginning 0.5 min before the inhalation of C15O2 (background scan duration 0.5 min, second scan duration 2.0 min) (adapted from Lammertsma et al. 1990). In this study, the integrated counts per pixel for the 2 minute build-up phase of radioactivity in the brain during C15O, inhalation were used as an index of rCBF (Fox & Mintun, 1989).

#### Measurement of plasma growth hormone

Apomorphine-induced increases in plasma growth hormone were determined from samples obtained from blood drawn from an in-dwelling venous cannula (t = -20, 0, 30 and 60 min post-apomorphine/placebo). Plasma growth hormone was measured by radioimmunoassay as previously described (Cowen *et al.* 1985).

### Measurement of side effects of apomorphine administration

Stress and arousal were assessed on three occasions (t = -15 min pre-apomorphine/placebo, +30 and +60 min, post-apomorphine/placebo) on a 24-item questionnaire (Mackay *et al.* 1978). In addition, subjects rated nausea, light-headedness and drowsiness on visual analogue scales.

#### Data analysis

Each reconstructed rCBF scan consisting of 15 primary transverse planes was interpolated to 43 planes to render the voxels approximately cubic.

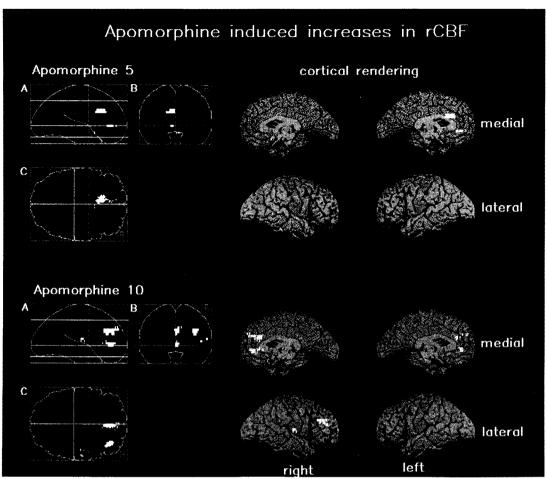


Fig. 1. Location of increases in rCBF following apomorphine (10 and  $5 \mu g/kg$ ) compared to placebo. Upper left images: the spatial distribution of significant voxels at P < 0.001 for apomorphine ( $5 \mu g/kg$ )-induced increases in rCBF, compared to placebo. Images are shown as intergrated projections through sagittal (A), coronal (B) and transverse (C) views of the brain. R = right. The axial extent of the data set is indicated by thick lines in the sagittal (A) view. Upper right: to aid interpretation of the areas of activation significant voxels are rendered onto medical and lateral views of each hemisphere.

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Lower left images: the spatial distribution voxels at P < 0.001 for apomorphine (10  $\mu$ g/kg)-induced increases in rCBF compared to placebo. Images are shown as integrated projections through sagittal (A), coronal (B) and transverse (C) views of the brain.

R = right. The axial extent of the data set is indicated by thick lines in the sagittal (A) view. Lower right: to aid interpretation of the areas of activation significant voxels are rendered onto medical and lateral views of each hemisphere.

Grasby et al. (Facing p. 607)

The data were then transformed into a standard stereotactic space (Friston *et al.* 1989, 1991*a*). Such transformation of the data allows for pixel by pixel averaging of data across subjects. In the standard space 1 voxel represents  $2 \times 2 \times 4$  mm in the x, y and z dimensions, respectively, allowing direct cross reference to the anatomical features in the standard stereotactic atlas (Talairach & Tournoux, 1988). A Gaussian filter (20 mm FWHM) was applied to smooth each image to account for inter-subject differences in gyral and functional anatomy and to suppress high frequency noise in the images.

Differences in global activity within and between subjects were removed by analysis of covariance (Wildt & Ahtola, 1978) on a pixel by pixel basis with global counts as covariate and regional activity across subjects for each task as treatment. This procedure was undertaken as inter- and intra-subject differences in global CBF may reduce the likelihood of detecting alterations in rCBF following physiological stimulation (Friston et al. 1990). For each pixel, in stereotactic space, the analysis of covariance generated 6 condition-specific (i.e. scans 1-6) mean rCBF equivalent values (normalized to 50 ml/dl/min) and an associated error variance. This error variance was computed independently for the placebo and apomorphine 5 and 10  $\mu$ g/kg groups using a completely randomized block design ANCOVA. The changes of interest were rCBF changes attributable to apomorphine that were statistically greater than those induced by placebo. This represents an interaction (predrug v. post-drug  $\times$  placebo v. apomorphine). This interaction term was computed using the t statistic, with the appropriate contrasts (Hand & Taylor, 1991) and adjusted error variance. The resulting set of t values constitutes a statistical parametric map (SPM(t)) (Friston *et al.* 1991*b*). With so many comparisons being made, many t values will reach conventional levels of significance by chance. Therefore, the 'omnibus' significance of the SPMs was assessed, using the  $\chi^2$  statistic, by comparing the expected and observed number of t values which exceeded a threshold of P < 0.001. If this statistic was significant (for a given contrast) the location of all pixels with a t value corresponding to P < 0.001 was used to define the profile of apomorphine-induced rCBF changes compared to placebo. The results presented are rCBF data

from the first pre-drug scan (scan 1) compared to post-drug scans (3+5), apomorphine 5 or  $10 \mu g/kg$  compared to placebo. Because of the smoothing filter used (see above) the final individual values for rCBF at any one pixel represent blood flow in a weighted spherical domain of about 20 mm diameter.

Image analysis was performed using SPM software (MRC Cyclotron Unit, London, UK) on a SPARC 1 workstation (Sun Microsystems Inc., Surrey, UK) using an interactive image analysis software package (ANALYZE), Biodynamic Research Unit, Mayo Clinic, USA). Calculations and image matrix manipulations were performed in PRO MATLAB (Mathworks Inc., New York).

#### **RESULTS**

Apomorphine-induced changes in rCBF represent relative increases or decreases compared to placebo. It should be noted that increases and decreases of rCBF may also have occurred outside the axial field of view of the scanner (see Fig. 1).

# Observed and expected distribution of t statistic for post-drug (scans 3+5) versus pre-drug (scan 1) comparisons

Significant differences in the observed and expected distribution of the t statistic (at the threshold of P < 0.001) for apomorphine (10  $\mu$ g/kg)-induced increases in rCBF compared to placebo were observed ( $\chi^2$  40·1, df 1, P < 0.001). Using the  $\chi^2$  test there was no significance for apomorphine (10  $\mu$ g/kg)-induced decreases ( $\chi^2 = 0$ , df 1). Apomorphine (5  $\mu$ g/kg)-induced increases failed to reach significance at the threshold of P < 0.001 but were significant at P < 0.01 ( $\chi^2 = 7.10$ , df 1). Apomorphine (5  $\mu$ g/kg)-induced decreases were not significant ( $\chi^2 = 0$ , df 1).

# Sites of apomorphine-induced increases of regional cerebral blood flow

Two foci of increased regional cerebral blood flow were observed in the anterior cingulate cortex (2, 40, 4 mm, and 2, 34, 24 mm in Talairach and Tournoux coordinates in the x, y and z plane respectively) following apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg$  (Table 1, Fig. 1, Fig. 2). Increased

Table 1. Coordinates of maximal significant increase in rCBF following apomorphine 10 µg/kg compared to placebo

Anterior cingulate Scan 3–1 Scan 5–1	Coordinates $(x, y, z)$			Apomorphine rCBF change	Placebo rCBF change
	2	40	4	$2.73 \pm 1.86$ $1.97 \pm 1.39$	$-0.74 \pm 1.28$ $-0.38 \pm 1.72$
Anterior cingulate Scan 3-1 Scan 5-1	2	34	24	$2.63 \pm 2.02$ $1.91 \pm 1.74$	$-1.03 \pm 0.80$ $-0.88 \pm 0.87$
Right prefrontal Scan 3-1 Scan 5-1	34	36	28	$     \begin{array}{l}       1.95 \pm 0.85 \\       1.83 \pm 1.24   \end{array} $	-0.79 ± 1.12 -1.64 ± 1.04

Stereotactic coordinates of maximal increases in rCBF following apomorphine  $10~\mu g/kg$  and placebo. Coordinates are given in x, y, and z coordinates in mm, from the atlas of Talairach & Tournoux (1988). Values refer to change in rCBF equivalents (post-drug–predrug) from spherical regions of diameter 20 mm centred at the coordinates shown. Results in rCBF equivalents, ml/dl/min, mean  $\pm$  s.b.

rCBF was also seen in the right prefrontal cortex following apomorphine (10  $\mu$ g/kg).

For apomorphine  $(5 \mu g/kg)$  a similar pattern of anterior cingulate increases in rCBF was noted (-4, 42, 0 mm and -8, 22, 24 mm in Talairach and Tournoux coordinates in the x, y and z plane respectively) (see Fig. 1) although the  $\chi^2$  test for this comparison failed to achieve significance at the threshold of P < 0.001.

## Plasma growth hormone following apomorphine (5 and $10 \mu g/kg$ )

Compared to placebo, plasma growth hormone increased following apomorphine administration at 5 and 10  $\mu$ g/kg. This increase was statistically significant for the 10  $\mu$ g/kg dose (growth hormone; post-drug at 60 min – predrug; apomorphine 10  $\mu$ g/kg 69 ± 29\* mlU/l, apomorphine 5  $\mu$ g/kg 24 ± 32 mlU/l and placebo 2±3 mlU/l, \*P < 0.01 Student's t test unpaired).

### Memory performance, stress, arousal and side effects of apomorphine administration

Memory performance in the five-word-list memory task was assessed as the total percentage of words correctly recalled during each scan. Both doses of apomorphine had no effect on the percentage of words correctly recalled (apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg = 98.5$ , 98.7, 98.0% and apomorphine  $5 \mu g/kg = 98.0$ , 98.0 and 100%,

means for scans 1, 3 and 5 respectively). Measures of stress decreased during the time of the PET study in both apomorphine  $5 \mu g/kg$ ,  $10 \mu g/kg$  and placebo treated groups. However, arousal increased in the apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg$  group (apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg$ ; stress  $16\pm 5$  to  $12\pm 2$ , arousal  $-3\pm 4$  to  $4\pm 9$ , apomorphine  $5 \mu g/kg$ ; stress  $17\pm 2$  to  $13\pm 1$ , arousal  $-1\pm 2$  to  $-6\pm 4$ , placebo group; stress  $19\pm 2$  to  $14\pm 2$ , arousal  $-1\pm 2$  to  $-7\pm 3$ , means  $\pm$  s.D.). Transient and mild nausea was noted by 3 subjects following apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg$  (data not shown).

#### DISCUSSION

A remarkably similar profile of apomorphineinduced increases of rCBF in the anterior cingulate was observed in both the apomorphine  $5 \mu g/kg$  and  $10 \mu g/kg$  treated groups (Fig. 1). The foci of these anterior cingulate activations differed by a maximum of 10, 12 and 4 mm only in the x, y and z planes for the two doses of apomorphine and therefore are unlikely to reflect real differences in the sites of activation between doses. In keeping with the drug's rapid onset and short duration of action (Gancher et al. 1989) these increases were greater at the first post-apomorphine  $10 \mu g/kg \text{ scan } (t = 15 \text{ min})$ than the second (t = +45 min) (see Table 1 and Fig. 2). Apomorphine-induced increases of rCBF were also seen in right prefrontal cortex at the 10  $\mu$ g/kg dose (Fig. 1) and the left prefrontal cortex but only at a lower threshold of P < 0.01(data not shown). The similarity in the location of rCBF increases in the anterior cingulate with both doses of apomorphine is strong evidence for a significant biological effect. It also suggests that non-specific side effects (transient nausea, increased arousal), seen following apomorphine 10 but not 5  $\mu$ g/kg, are unlikely to be a sufficient explanation for the changes in rCBF.

The apomorphine-induced increases of rCBF in this study are in broad agreement with the reported stimulatory effects of dopamine agonists on cerebral blood flow (CBF) in animals and man. In man, the dopamine agonists apomorphine, piribedil, bromocriptine and the dopamine precursor L-DOPA all increase CBF (Guell *et al.* 1982; Bes *et al.* 1983; Leenders *et al.* 1985; Sabatini *et al.* 1991). In the anaesthetized baboon apomorphine (0·02–0·5 mg/kg) also

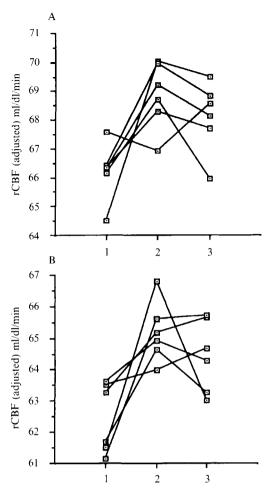


Fig. 2. rCBF increases in the anterior cingulate following apomorphine ( $10 \mu g/kg$ ). Values on ordinate are cerebral blood flow equivalents (ml/dl/min) for individual subjects, normalized to a global blood flow of 50 ml/dl/min, in the anterior cingulate at the two foci of maximal change in rCBF (see Table 1). A. Anterior cingulate at coordinates 2, 34, 24 (mm in x, y and z planes respectively). B. Anterior cingulate at Talairach and Tournoux coordinates 2, 40, 4 (mm in x, y and z planes respectively).  $\Box$ , Individual values for rCBF. The abscissa refers to PET scan sequence: 1, first scan; 2, third scan; 3, fifth scan. Apomorphine was given between points 1 and 2 on the abscissa.

increases CBF (McCulloch & Murray-Harper, 1977). In agreement with our results in some human studies a selective increase in prefrontal rCBF has been noted (Bes et al. 1983; Daniel et al. 1991). In addition, a relative increase in glucose metabolism in frontal areas has been reported by Cleghorn et al. (1991) following apomorphine. In the single tomographic slice examined no anterior cingulate changes were noted (Cleghorn et al. 1991).

Despite agreement on the direction of the expected change in CBF, the mechanism of dopamine agonist induced changes in CBF is

contentious (see McCulloch et al. 1982; Leenders et al. 1985). Either of two mechanisms might account for the observed effects; a direct vasodilatory effect of apomorphine on cerebral blood vessels or an effect of apomorphine on neuronal firing, with consequent changes in glucose metabolism and rCBF. This issue is unresolved at present. For example, in Parkinsonian patients apomorphine (0·3 mg s.c.) increased global CBF but this effect was blocked by the peripheral dopamine receptor blocker domperidone (20 mg t.d.s. for 48 h), suggesting a primary vasodilatatory effect of apomorphine

(Sabatini et al. 1991). In contrast, the increase in CBF in normal volunteers following the dopamine agonist piribedil was not blocked by domperidone (30 mg 20 min before piribedil) (Guell et al. 1982) suggesting a direct metabolic effect. Despite the evidence for dopamine receptors in the cerebral vasculature and the vasodilatory effects of dopamine agonists on cerebral vessels in vitro and in vivo (Toda, 1976; Edvinsson et al. 1978, 1985), there is strong evidence from studies in the conscious rat and the anaesthetized baboon that apomorphine induced changes in cerebral blood flow are secondary to changes in cerebral metabolism (McCulloch & Murray-Harper, 1976; McCulloch et al. 1982). In support of a direct effect of apomorphine on neuronal firing, Cleghorn (1991) has recently reported increased posterior frontal metabolism in normal volunteers following apomorphine 10 µg/kg. The discrete regional location of apomorphineinduced increases in rCBF in this study would also favour an explanation via changes in neuronal activity.

Apomorphine stimulates dopamine autoreceptors located on cell bodies or dendrites of dopaminergic neurones but also acts on dopaminergic receptors post synaptic to dopamine neurones (Aghajanian & Bunney, 1977). Either or both sites might be the pharmacological site of action of apomorphine at which the effects on rCBF are mediated. If a direct post-synaptic effect on dopamine receptors in the anterior cingulate is postulated then D<sub>1</sub> receptor stimulation would seem more likely as dopamine D<sub>1</sub> receptors are in higher concentration than dopamine D2 receptors in cortical areas (Camps et al. 1989; Cortes et al. 1989). If a direct action on pre-synaptic dopamine autoreceptors is postulated then rCBF changes might be manifest in areas of dense dopaminergic terminal innervation. Unlike the restricted dopaminergic innervation of the rat cortex, in man, most cortical areas are innervated. However, innervation is most dense in the anterior cingulate and motor cortex where dopaminergic projections are to all cortical layers (Berger et al. 1991). Whatever the pharmacological site of action of apomorphine in this study, equivalent studies with dopaminergic agonists in animals would suggest that these effects will best be understood in neuroanatomical relation to circuits

(McCulloch, 1982; Soncrant *et al.* 1986), of which mesocortical dopaminergic projections are likely to be an important factor.

No striatal activations were noted following either dose of apomorphine. Interestingly, Cleghorn et al. (1991) also reported no changes in striatal activity, indexed by glucose consumption, following apomorphine administration in normal volunteers. Mismatches between drug effects and receptor distributions/terminal innervation patterns are clearly described in the animal functional imaging field (McCulloch, 1982). In addition, putative physiological differences between mesostriatal and mesoneocortical dopaminergic systems (De Keyser et al. 1990) might account for the differential effects of apomorphine in frontal and striatal areas.

Subjects were studied under the condition of five-word-list learning. Memory task induced activations of neuronal circuits may therefore have masked apomorphine effects in certain brain areas. However, any baseline condition, even a 'resting state', is likely to be associated with activations in distributed networks (e.g. attentional systems). Therefore, drug effects will always be manifest in the context of the integrated functioning of activated neuronal systems. As apomorphine did not affect performance in the five-word-list memory task apomorphine's effects are unlikely to represent an alteration in the magnitude or pattern of memory task activation pre-drug versus postdrug.

Further pharmacological characterization with dopamine antagonists is needed to provide a conclusive pharmacological interpretation of our results. Despite this limitation, the results suggest that mapping of central drug effects with PET with serve as an extension to the more established neuroendrocine challenge paradigms for investigating central neurotransmission in psychiatric illness. Thus, while apomorphineinduced increases in plasma growth hormone reflect dopaminergic receptor sensitivity in the hypothalamus (Checkley, 1980), clearly other cortical and limbic structures are more likely candidates for dopaminergic functional abnormalities in psychiatric illness. Apomorphineinduced changes in cingulate rCBF may provide a direct index of central dopaminergic function in a brain area not currently accessible with neuroendocrine challenges.

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