

J. Donald Smiley

Medical Grand Rounds  
Parkland Memorial Hospital

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### *ROLE OF COMPLEMENT IN HUMAN DISEASES*

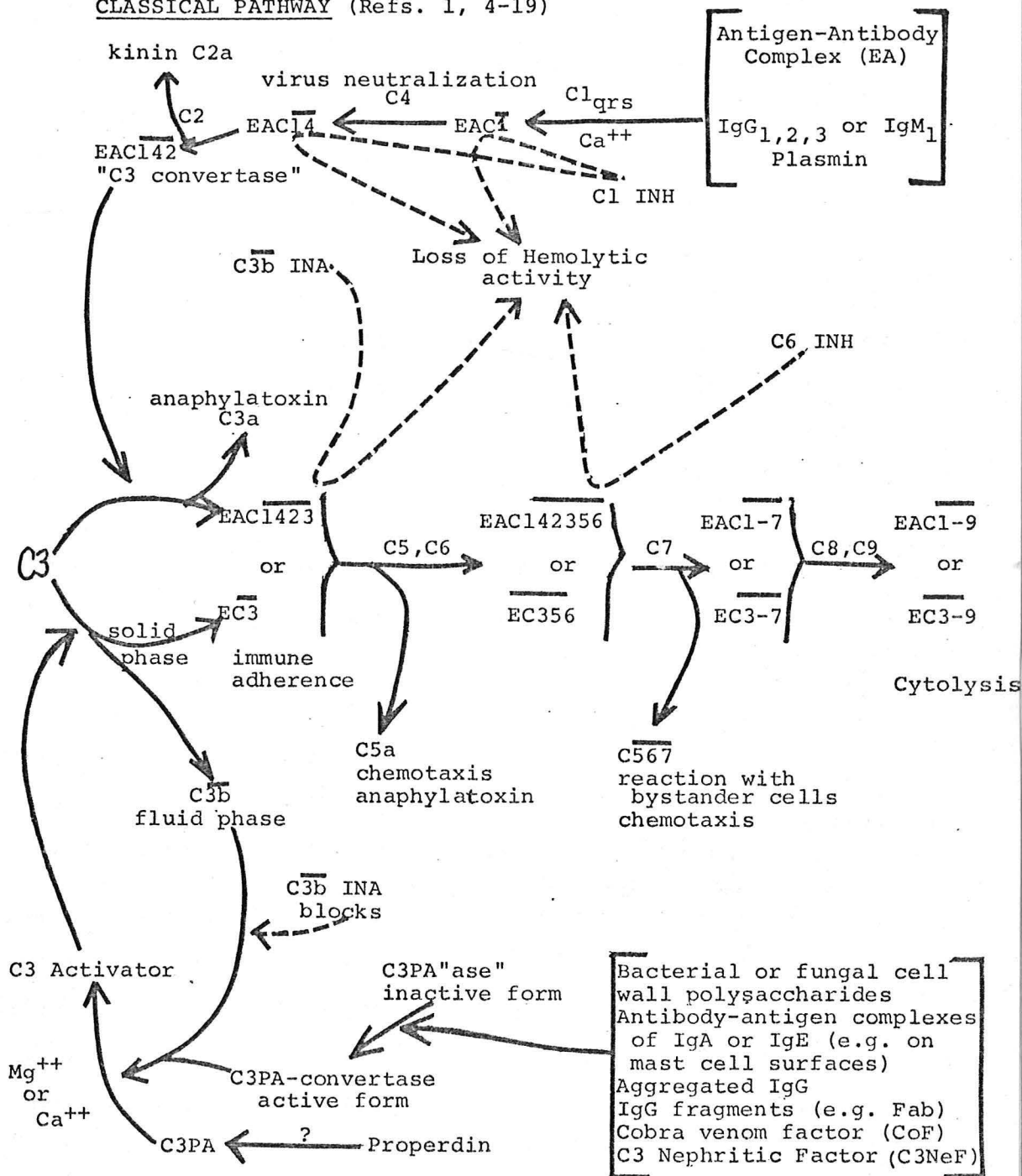
Inflammation which accompanies disease processes results from the interaction of several complex systems of defense, selected by nature to sound the alarm, mobilize the army of cellular defenders and ultimately to destroy or expel the noxious stimulus. These systems include bradykinin release, clotting and fibrinolysis, the immune response and activation of the complement pathways (Ref. 1). Each system has one or more points of interrelationship with the others, often sharing common activators, such as Hageman factor or inhibitors such as C1 inhibitor (Ref. 2).

Defects, imbalances, hyper- or hypofunction among these interacting systems of serum proteins in themselves can produce or augment disease entities. Those diseases involving the complement system have drawn a flurry of medical attention during the last three years, and include pathology in almost every organ. These developments are outlined in the order to be discussed below:

- I. Biologic functions of the classical and alternate complement pathways.
- II. Genetic defects of complement components or their serum inactivators.
- III. Hypocomplementemic glomerulonephritis and partial lipodystrophy.
- IV. Diseases in which defective chemotaxis of polymorphonuclear leukocytes may be related to the complement system.
- V. Diseases in which impaired opsonization of bacteria and other antigens by polymorphonuclear leukocytes is produced by alternate complement pathway abnormalities.
- VI. Role of the complement system in the accelerated hemolysis of erythrocytes in paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria and related disorders.
- VII. Participation of complement in inflammatory skin diseases (bullous pemphigoid, dermatitis herpetiformis, herpes gestationis and systemic lupus erythematosus).
- VIII. Interaction of the complement system with the kinin, clotting and fibrinolytic systems in shock and diffuse intravascular coagulation.
- IX. Measurement of complement components as diagnostic tools in the rheumatic diseases.

## I. BIOLOGIC FUNCTIONS OF THE CLASSICAL AND ALTERNATE COMPLEMENT PATHWAYS

Figure 1.  
CLASSICAL PATHWAY (Refs. 1, 4-19)



ALTERNATE PATHWAY (Refs. 3, 20-37)

Table I. Physiocochemical Characteristics of Proteins of the Complement System (From Ruddy, et al, Ref. 1 and Lachmann, Ref. 3)

| Name                       | Molecular Weight (Daltons) | Electrophoretic mobility | Approximate Serum Conc. $\mu\text{g/ml}$ | Major Fragments          |
|----------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| Classic Components:        |                            |                          |  |                          |
| C1 <sub>q</sub>            | 400,000                    | $\gamma 2$               | 190                                      |                          |
| C1 <sub>r</sub>            | 168,000                    | $\beta$                  | ---                                      |                          |
| C1 <sub>s</sub>            | 79,000                     | $\alpha 2$               | 120                                      |                          |
| C4                         | 240,000                    | $\beta 1$                | 430                                      | C4a, C4b                 |
| C2                         | 117,000                    | $\beta 2$                | 30                                       | C2a, C2b                 |
| C3                         | 185,000                    | $\beta 1$                | 1,300                                    | C3a, C3b                 |
| C5                         | 185,000                    | $\beta 1$                | 75                                       | C5a, C5b                 |
| C6                         | 125,000                    | $\beta 2$                | 60                                       |                          |
| C7                         | ---                        | $\beta 2$                | <1                                       |                          |
| C8                         | 150,000                    | $\gamma 1$               | <1                                       |                          |
| C9                         | 79,000                     | $\alpha$                 | <1                                       |                          |
| Alternate pathway factors: |                            |                          |  |                          |
| Properdin                  | 223,000                    | $\gamma 2$               | 20                                       |                          |
| C3PA                       | 105,000                    | $\beta 2$                | 225                                      | a-fragment<br>b-fragment |
| C3PA convertase            | 40,000                     | $\alpha$                 | <1                                       |                          |
| Control proteins:          |                            |                          |  |                          |
| C1 <sub>INH</sub>          | 90,000                     | $\alpha 2$               | 180                                      |                          |
| C3 <sub>B</sub> INA        | 100,000                    | $\beta 2$                | 25                                       |                          |
| C6 <sub>INA</sub>          | ---                        | $\beta 1$                | --                                       |                          |
| Anaphylatoxin INA          | 310,000                    | $\alpha$                 | --                                       |                          |

## II. GENETIC DEFECTS OF COMPLEMENT COMPONENTS OR THEIR SERUM INACTIVATORS (Ref. 38, 39, 40)

Table II

| <u>Missing Component</u> | <u>Associated Clinical Features</u>                               | <u>(References)</u> |
|--------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Cl <sub>q</sub>          | Lymphopenic agammaglobulinemia, severe repeated infections        | (41,42)             |
| Cl <sub>r</sub>          | Systemic lupus erythematosus, repeated infections                 | (43)                |
| C2                       | Systemic lupus erythematosus                                      | (44,45,46)          |
| C3                       | Repeated infections   | (47,48)             |
| C5                       | Defective chemotaxis, gram negative bacterial infections          | (49)                |
| C6                       | No persistent disease, no abnormality of hemostasis               | (50,51)             |
| C1INH                    | Hereditary angioneurotic edema                                    | (52,53,54,55)       |
| C3bINA                   | Repeated infections, low C3 and non-γ Coombs positive anemia      | (56)                |
| C3 Activator present     | Partial lipodystrophy, repeated infections, (? missing inhibitor) | (57)                |

## III. HYPOCOMPLEMENTEMIC GLOMERULONEPHRITIS AND PARTIAL LIPODYSTROPHY

When renal biopsy specimens are stained for complement (C3) and IgG in patients with membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis without other associated systemic illness, between 10 and 25% show C3 but no IgG (Refs. 58, 59). Children and occasional adults with these findings often have persistently low C3 in their serum (Ref. 60) and possess a factor (Ref. 61) C3 nephritic factor (C3NeF) capable of degrading the C3 in normal serum. A fragment of C3 (C3d) is also consistently present in the serum of patients with this form of nephritis (Ref. 62) and reflects the continued active destruction of C3 *in vivo*. In addition to this accelerated destruction, the body synthesis of C3 is also decreased (Ref. 63) causing the serum level to fall even further.



When kidney biopsies from patients with this form of nephritis are stained with the Jones methenamine silver method, a lobular proliferative glomerulonephritis is noted with some type of non-silver staining material separating the glomerular basement membrane into two portions giving a pattern described as a "tram track" appearance (Ref. 58). More selective fluorescent antibody staining of the renal glomeruli from patients with hypocomplementemic membranoproliferative glomerulonephritis have shown C3PA and properdin (Ref. 64), in addition to C3 to be present.

In order for C3NeF to activate C3, it must interact with C3PA (Ref. 65). It has been suggested that this occurs in the kidney glomerulus allowing C3b to attach to the capillary walls leading to glomerular damage (Ref. 66). The requirement of C3b for C3NeF action reinforces the role of the alternate pathway (Refs. 67, 68, 69) in hypocomplementemic glomerulonephritis. Nephrectomy does not eliminate C3NeF from the blood or restore C3 to normal, suggesting extrarenal C3NeF formation. However, both spontaneous and steroid-induced disappearance of C3NeF have been observed (Ref. 58).

Other forms of glomerulonephritis have been found to have C3NeF with selective depletion of the alternate and late complement pathway components. These include acute post streptococcal glomerulonephritis (Refs. 69, 70, 71) and an unusual hereditary nephropathy (Ref. 72).

Paradoxically, in one study of 21 adults with glomerulonephritis in whom elevations above 2 standard deviations of the mean C'H50 (total hemolytic complement) were found, a significantly shortened life expectancy ( $p < 0.01$ ) was present (Ref. 73) causing some doubt about the potential harm to the kidneys induced by C3 depletion.

Table

III. COMPLEMENT PROFILE IN PARTIAL LIPODYSTROPHY (Refs. 77, 78)  
(% normal human ref. serum)

| Patient      | Symptoms         | Cl <sub>q</sub> , C4, C6, C7 | C3     | C3PA   | C3d | C3NeF | C3bINA |
|--------------|------------------|------------------------------|--------|--------|-----|-------|--------|
| 1            | Recurrent URI's  | all normal                   | 11     | n1     | +   | +     | ND     |
| 2            | Behavior prob.   | all normal                   | 13     | n1     | +   | +     | ND     |
| 3            | Behavior prob.   | all normal                   | 28     | n1     | +   | +     | ND     |
| 4            | Edema, HBP       | all normal                   | 28     | 85     | +   | +     | +      |
| 5            | Edema, HBP       | all normal                   | 20     | 65     | +   | +     | +      |
| 6            | Proteinuria, HBP | normal<br>(C6, C7, ND)       | 25     | 100    | +   | +     | +      |
| Normal range |                  |                              | 68-126 | 65-115 | 0   | 0     | +      |

ed cells of patients 4, 5 and 6 were non-γ Coomb's (C3) positive, patients 1, 2 and 3 were not tested.

PATIENT WITH PARTIAL LIPODYSTROPHY, SYSTEMIC LUPUS ERYTHEMATOSUS AND HYPOCOMPLEMENTEMIC NEPHRITIS.

■■■■■. This 34 year-old ■■■■ female was admitted for evaluation of a syndrome consisting of liver disease, diabetes, arthritis, pleurisy and pericarditis. At age 4 or 5 she had developed partial lipodystrophy with loss of fat from the subcutaneous tissues of the upper half of the body except for mammary tissues. Laboratory findings included occasionally positive antinuclear antibody, 4+ positive RA latex fixation test and persistently low C3 in the range of 20 to 30 mg% (normal 90-170 mg%). She had a long history of multiple infections throughout childhood including draining lymphadenitis, meningococcal meningitis 1956, pneumonia 1963, urinary tract infections 1966 and 1968 and recurrent polyserositis since 1959. In the ■■■■ Arthritis Clinic in the past, she has shown moderate improvement when treated with prednisone 15-30 mg/day, but always failed to raise the serum C3 level. A renal biopsy in 1967 showed "mesangial glomerulitis".

Physical findings in ■■■■ 1973 showed prominent upper body lipodystrophy, a pericardial friction rub, liver enlargement, and patches of monilia on the buccal mucosa. Clinical evaluation of renal function showed normal BUN, creatinine and creatinine clearance. Blood sugars ranged from 300 to 400 mg%. C3 = 38 mg%, C'H50 = 45 Units (nl. range = 60-110), SGOT = 98 (nl. = 40), alkaline phosphatase = 27.

The patient's mother who is clinically asymptomatic has a C3 level of 58 mg%. Bacterial opsonization by normal polymorphonuclear leukocytes was markedly impaired in pt. and mother's sera; both were capable of causing conversion of C3 to C3b when mixed with normal serum compatible with the presence of C3NeF.

COMMENT Low C3 and the presence of C3NeF have been observed in relatives of patients with lipodystrophy who do not have clinically evident disease, including another mother-daughter combination currently being followed by Dr. Norma Battles at ■■■■ in ■■■■. The variable presence of partial lipodystrophy, of mesangio-proliferative glomerulonephritis, and in the case of our patient, ■■■■, of associated SLE suggests a genetic factor which provides susceptibility coupled with exogenous factors (? chronic viral infections) which lead to the diseases observed in some patients and not in others.

The delayed onset of the lipodystrophy at age 4, for example in ■■■■, or older in other observed patients and the long duration of partial lipodystrophy in some patients 15 to 20 years prior to the onset of rapidly progressive glomerulonephritis would be consistent with this impression (Refs. 74-78).

Dr. Havel and his coworkers (Ref. 75) have observed insulin-resistant hyperglycemia, blunted responses in serum levels of free fatty acids after norepinephrine infusions, and decreased release of insulin following carbohydrate challenge in patients with partial lipodystrophy, not unlike that which might be observed in patients subjected to pheochromocytoma.

IV. DISEASES IN WHICH DEFECTIVE CHEMOTAXIS MAY BE RELATED TO THE COMPLEMENT SYSTEM.

Chemotaxis, the chemical attraction of polymorphonuclear leukocytes to the local site of an inflammatory stimulus may be achieved by at least five serum factors as well as closely related polypeptides derived from bacteria such as *E. coli*. All of these factors are restricted to their local function by a high concentration in the serum of a potent chemotactic factor inactivator (Ref. 79).

Two of the most potent of these factors, C $\overline{567}$  and C5a are derived from C5. When this component of the complement system is genetically absent chemotaxis is severely impaired and severe gram negative infections result (Ref. 49). Similarly, patients with hypocomplementemic nephritis may show a severe chemotactic defect (Ref. 80).

TABLE IV. FACTORS CHEMOTACTIC FOR NEUTROPHILES

| <u>Source</u>                              | <u>Mol. Wt.<br/>Daltons</u> | <u>References</u> |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| <u>Complement - related</u>                |                             |                   |
| C $\overline{567}$                         | 17,000                      | (81)              |
| C5a  | 10,000                      | (82, 83)          |
| C3a  | 6,800                       | (84)              |
| <u>Hageman Factor-related</u>              |                             |                   |
| from prekallikrein                         | unknown                     | (85)              |
| from plasminogen<br>proactivator           | unknown                     | (86)              |
| <u>Soluble bacterial factors</u>           | ~2,000                      | (87)              |
| <u>Lysosomal factors in polys</u>          | unknown                     | (87)              |
| <u>Products of collagen<br/>hydrolysis</u> | unknown                     | (87)              |

# V. DISEASE RELATED TO IMPAIRED OPSONIZATION OF BACTERIA AND OTHER ANTIGENS BY NEUTROPHILES DUE TO ALTERNATE PATHWAY ABNORMALITIES

Some of the most dangerous microorganisms for man such as *Pneumococci* (Refs. 88, 89, 90) and *Pseudomonas* (Refs. 91, 92) are not killed by whole serum even when high titers of specific antibody are present, but require the participation of neutrophils for bactericidal effect. The chemical signals for opsonization of bacteria have been termed "opsonins" and are, unlike antibody, destroyed by heating serum to 56°C for 30 minutes (Ref. 93). Recent work has shown the most important opsonins to be by-products of the alternate complement pathway (Ref. 94, 95). Patients with inherited defects of the early complement components of the classical pathway have approximately 60% of normal bacterial opsonization (Ref. 98) because cell wall components of most bacteria and fungi can activate the alternate pathway and allow bacterial phagocytosis even in agammaglobulinemic serum (Ref. 96). About 15% of new-born infants have such low levels of the alternate pathway (properdin) components that their serum does not provide adequate bacterial opsonization and they are at increased risk for serious infections (Refs. 97, 98). Other diseases such as SLE with acquired complement depletion also show low serum opsonic capacity (Ref. 99).

The immunologic "short circuits" provided by bacterial activation of the complement pathways in the complete absence of specific antibody represent a first line of defense which ordinarily limits bacterial multiplication by facilitation of phagocytosis (Ref. 100). Staphylococcal protein A does this by forming a non-immunologic complex with IgG which depletes the classical pathway beginning with C1 (Ref. 101).

Some rheumatoid factors (anti-IgG) including those which are formed in SBE in man compete for the complement (C1q) binding site on the heavy chain portion of IgG (Refs. 102, 103) and may severely impair opsonization of *Streptococcus viridans* providing an additional explanation for bacterial survival on valvular surfaces in patients with very high specific antibody titers. This adverse effect on neutrophil opsonization may extend to other diseases in which rheumatoid factors are found.

*Meningococci* require specific antibody and the participation of the classical pathway (Ref. 104), while *Pneumococci* are just as readily phagocytosed and killed in C4-deficient serum as normal serum indicating an absolute requirement for alternate complement pathway activation (Ref. 90).

Gram negative bacterial endotoxin (lipopolysaccharide) is actually detoxified by interaction with complement components beginning with alternate pathway activation, yet another example of a protective function for this system (Refs. 105, 106, 107).

## VI. ROLE OF THE COMPLEMENT SYSTEM IN HEMATOLOGIC DISORDERS

### Autoimmune hemolytic anemia, cold agglutinin disease and paroxysmal nocturnal hemoglobinuria (PNH)

The normal adult synthesizes about 80 mg of C3 per hour. This increases only slightly with autoimmune hemolytic anemia of the cold agglutinin type or in that induced by  $\alpha$ -methyldopa ingestion. However, it approximately doubles in patients with active hemolysis related to PNH (Ref. 108).

Usually, hemolysis of human red cells requires a permanent fixation of specific antibody to the erythrocyte surface. The transient attachment of IgM-cold agglutinin allows a conversion of C3 to C3b, some of which adheres to the adjacent red cell membrane, but often fails to activate later components and produce direct lysis. Phagocytosis and intracellular destruction of erythrocytes may follow this event, however (Ref. 109), but the surface bound C3b is usually rapidly converted to an inactive product by C3bINA (Ref. 110). Only when extreme cold stress leads to accelerated C3b attachment does intravascular hemolysis occur.

The difference in susceptibility to intravascular hemolysis noted with normal red cells when compared to erythrocytes from patients with PNH can be explained by 1) an increased number of C3b binding sites on the PNH cell surface and 2) a much greater susceptibility to complement lysis of the erythrocyte membrane in this disorder (Refs. 111, 112).

This lysis of PNH erythrocytes has now been shown to occur via the alternate complement pathway, and it can be greatly enhanced by slight increases in the serum magnesium concentration (Ref. 113). The latter finding is the basis for a more sensitive test for PNH cells in which 0.6 mEq/liter of  $MgCl_2$  is added to the Ham test (acidified serum) producing a selective hemolysis of the abnormal red cells.

### Mechanism for the increased susceptibility to infections in patients with sickle-cell disease

Any form of intravascular red cell destruction which releases erythrocyte stroma may activate the alternate complement pathway (Ref. 114).

The earlier observations of a significant increase in life-threatening infections such as pneumococcal meningitis (Ref. 115) or salmonella osteomyelitis in patients with sickle-cell disease are now believed related to an acquired defect in the level of properdin pathway constituents (Ref. 116) which are required for adequate opsonization of these bacteria. *In vitro* studies of bacterial opsonization in the presence of sera from patients with sickle-cell disease have shown a marked decrease in phagocytosis when relatively low levels of specific antibody are present (Ref. 117).

VII. PARTICIPATION OF COMPLEMENT IN INFLAMMATORY SKIN DISEASES

TABLE V

| Skin Disease<br>(No. of patients) | Immunofluorescent Staining       |              |   | Reference |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|---|-----------|
|                                   | Site of<br>Deposit               | Ig           | Complement<br>Components                                    |           |
| Herpes gestationis (1)            | B.M.                             | None         | C3, C5<br>properdin   | (119)     |
| Dermatitis herpetiformis (19)     | B.M.                             | IgA          | C3  | (120)     |
| Bullous pemphigoid (6)            | B.M.                             | IgG          | C1 <sub>q</sub> , C3, C3PA<br>properdin                     | (119)     |
| Systemic lupus erythematosus (25) | B.M.                             | [IgG<br>IgM] | [C1 <sub>q</sub> , C3, C4, C5<br>C3PA-12%<br>properdin-20%] | (119)     |
| Pemphigus vulgaris                | epidermal<br>cement<br>substance | IgG          | C3, C4  | (121)     |

B.M. = basement membrane of involved skin.

It is believed that some mechanism of activation of only the alternate pathway of complement activation is present in Herpes gestationis (no known association to virus infection), a rare vesicular skin eruption appearing spontaneously in one out of 11,000 pregnancies, usually during the last trimester or post-partum and worse with each subsequent pregnancy. The condition is not usually fatal, and recedes without leaving permanent scarring. It may last many months. No effective treatment is known.

In dermatitis herpetiformis, there are deposits of IgA in the basement membrane of the skin and activation of the alternate complement pathway is characteristic. It is a benign, but troublesome disorder. The high association of a gluten-related sprue with this disorder strongly suggests some immunological reaction involving gluten allergy in these patients.

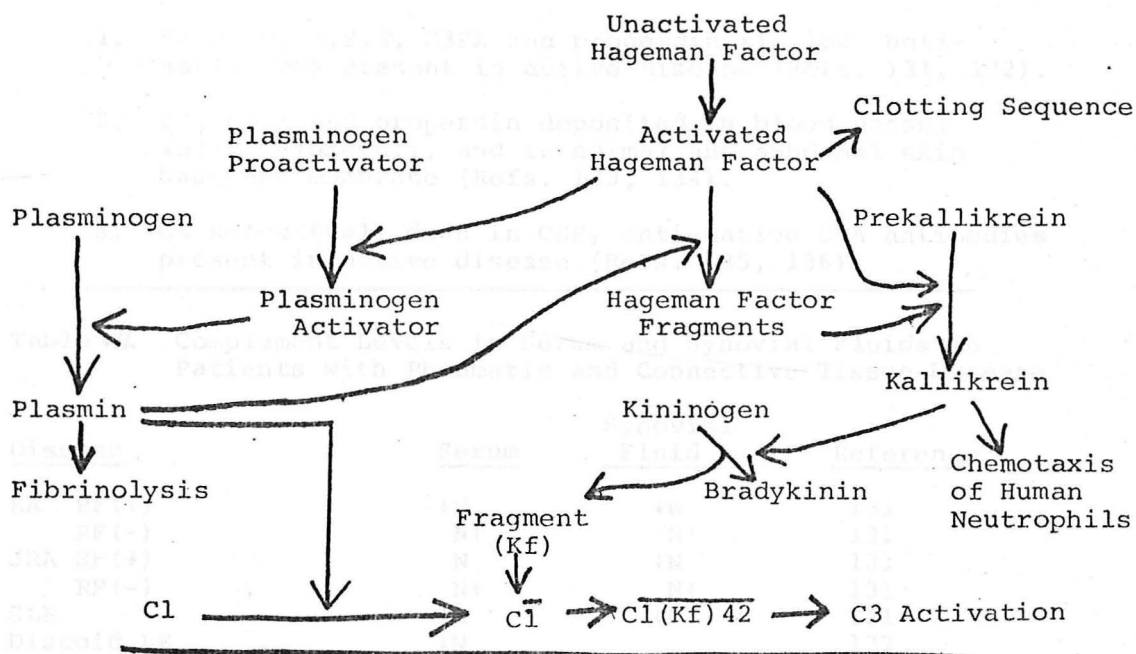
Bullous pemphigoid is a relatively benign condition in which crops of superficial bullae filled with serosanguinous fluid appear. The latter contain C3 activator as well as components of the classical complement pathway (Ref. 118). This data, together with that obtained by fluorescent antibody staining presented in Table V above suggest that both pathways are being activated, probably by anti-basement membrane antibody of IgG type.

Pemphigus vulgaris is a serious disorder characterized by deposits of IgG around the epidermal cells in the region of the intracellular cement substance. This is associated with activation of the classical complement pathway.



VIII. INTERACTION OF THE COMPLEMENT SYSTEMS WITH THE KININ, CLOTTING AND FIBRINOLYTIC SYSTEMS IN SHOCK AND IN DIFFUSE INTRAVASCULAR COAGULATION

Fig. 2.



The initiating event in the generation of bradykinin in human plasma (Fig. 2) is the activation of Hageman factor by a variety of biologic materials (Ref. 1). Activated Hageman factor not only initiates the clotting sequence but also interacts with plasminogen proactivator, to initiate fibrinolysis via the conversion of plasminogen to plasmin (Ref. 2). Plasmin in turn digests active Hageman factor to form the Hageman-factor fragments which can activate prekallikrein to kallikrein. This diverts the reaction sequence from coagulation to kinin release (Ref. 2).

Activation of Hageman factor initiates coagulation by converting plasma thromboplastin antecedent to its active form, and can directly activate prekallikrein to kallikrein at a limited rate in the fluid phase. Plasmin is a protease which can split fibrin and fibrinogen, cleave C3 to produce C3a, activate C1 to an active C1 and split Hageman factor. Kallikrein splits an  $\alpha$ -globulin, kininogen to form bradykinin, and is also a chemotactic factor for neutrophils independent of the complement pathways.

This interplay of systems provides a reserve of overlapping functions which often protect the individual with isolated genetic defect in one protein component.

The technical details of these interactions are given in Refs. 122-130.

IX. COMPLEMENT COMPONENTS AS DIAGNOSTIC TOOLS IN RHEUMATIC DISEASES

Table VI. Complement and Antibodies to Native DNA in Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

1. Serum C1,4,2,3, C3PA and properdin all low, anti-native DNA present in active disease (Refs. 131, 132).
2. C3, C3PA and properdin deposited in blood vessel walls, glomeruli, and in normal and abnormal skin basement membrane (Refs. 133, 134).
3. C4 selectively down in CSF, anti-native DNA antibodies present in active disease (Refs. 135, 136).

Table VII. Complement Levels in Serum and Synovial Fluids in Patients with Rheumatic and Connective Tissue Disease

| Disease                   | Serum | Synovial Fluid | Reference     |
|---------------------------|-------|----------------|---------------|
| RA RF(+)                  | ↓N    | ↓N             | 131           |
| RF(-)                     | N↑    | N↑             | 131           |
| JRA RF(+)                 | N     | ↓N             | 131           |
| RF(-)                     | N↑    | N↑             | 131           |
| SLE                       | ↓N    | ↓N             | 131           |
| Discoid LE                | ↓N    |                | 137           |
| Drug-induced lupus        | N     |                | 137           |
| Osteoarthritis            | N     |                | 138           |
| Rheumatic fever           | N↑    |                | 139           |
| Gout                      | N↑    | ↓N↑            | 137, 140      |
| Pseudogout                |       | ↓N↑            | 140           |
| Reiter's syndrome         | N↑    | ↑              | 137, 140, 141 |
| Scleroderma               | ↓N    |                | 137, 142, 143 |
| Dermatomyositis           | N↑    |                | 142, 144      |
| Sjögren's syndrome        | ↓N    |                | 137, 145      |
| Lupoid hepatitis          | ↓N    |                | 137, 146      |
| Polyarteritis             | N↑    |                | 137, 142      |
| Acute polyarthritis       | N↑    | N↑             | 137, 140      |
| Acute bacterial arthritis |       | ↓N↑            | 140           |
| Psoriatic arthritis       |       | N              | 140           |
| Ankylosing spondylitis    |       | ↑              | 147           |
| Cryoglobulinemic purpura  | ↓     |                |               |
| Serum sickness            | ↓N    |                |               |
| Hepatitis (Au + )         |       |                |               |
| with arthritis            | ↓N    |                | 148           |

N = normal



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