Preface

Allergy: The “Whole” Story

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Editor

A subspecialist friend of mine once told me, in jest, “get an organ” as we were debating over which of us should manage a disease that overlapped in both of our specialties. However, to do so is impossible in the field of allergy. As allergist-immunologists, we quickly came to understand that allergic diseases are immunologic, and by definition, involve the entire body. It is true that many allergic diseases manifest predominantly in 1 organ, such as asthma involving the lung or atopic dermatitis involving the skin, yet all allergic diseases are systemic. This is why treating allergic rhinitis with antihistamines and topical steroids can improve asthma symptoms, and why immunotherapy can prevent further allergic sensitizations and even the development of asthma. It also explains why sinusitis can cause asthma exacerbations, and if left untreated, can be a cause of persistent asthma that is difficult to control. It explains why allergic drug reactions, which mainly manifest as skin rashes, can also cause fever, renal failure, and liver failure and why venom immunotherapy can markedly reduce the risk of anaphylaxis to stinging insects in high-risk patients.

Allergic diseases are on the rise, and allergic manifestations are ever changing. For example, de novo food allergy is presenting more commonly in adults, and gastrointestinal manifestations of food allergy, such as eosinophilic esophagitis and pollen-food allergy syndrome, are increasing in incidence. Atopic dermatitis, thought to be the first step in the “atopic march,” is being recognized more commonly in adults with no previous history of childhood eczema. Asthma is increasing in epidemic proportions.

In our world of increasing specialization, it can be difficult to look beyond the target organ, yet this is oftentimes what is needed to provide the best patient care. My goal is that this issue will serve as a resource to you, the internist, to help shed light on allergic
diseases, to assist in recognizing nuances in presentation, and to inform you of the most effective treatments.

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