Sjogren’s Syndrome (SS) is an autoimmune disorder usually characterized by xerostomia and xerophthalmia, but the clinical presentation can be highly variable. In suspected cases of SS, patients are often referred for a labial minor salivary gland biopsy. However, studies have shown this test to be unreliable. Pathologic misinterpretation and immunosuppressive medications may affect the results of the biopsy. As a result, it is best to perform this procedure only when necessary. The purpose of the current study was to review clinical signs and symptoms of patients who underwent a lip biopsy to determine which patients most benefited from this procedure.

Figure 1. Labial minor salivary glands are removed through an incision in the lower lip. Care is taken not to disturb the sensory branch of V₃.

Specific Aims

To clarify the necessity of a lip biopsy in the diagnosis Sjogren’s Syndrome.

Figure 2. Sicca and Serology as Predictors of Lip Biopsy

Results

This was a retrospective chart review of patients who underwent a lip biopsy for a possible diagnosis of SS at the University of Chicago Hospitals between November 2002 and November 2004. In a previously completed study, these biopsy specimens were reviewed and re-graded under the currently accepted grading system. The clinical presentation and laboratory findings of the patients were compared.

When excluding patients who were on corticosteroids, 82% of those patients with both sicca symptoms and positive serology had a Grade=4 while 67% of those without both of sicca symptoms and positive serology had a Grade<4 (p=.011).

Conclusion

In this study, the best predictor of biopsy results was presence of sicca symptoms and a serological abnormality of either anti-SSA or anti-SSB antibodies. Patients with this typical presentation of SS do not derive additional benefit from a lip biopsy, and this procedure should be reserved for diagnosing patients with heterogeneous symptom complexes and equivocal or negative serological testing. Physicians should be wary of ordering a lip biopsy of patients on immunosuppression with clear criterion for SS. When physicians suspect SS, a full and thorough clinical and laboratory examination is necessary in order to determine if this invasive test is truly necessary.

Reference