CORRELATION OF NEUTROPHILS/LYMPHOCYTES RATIO AND C-REACTIVE PROTEIN IN SEPSIS PATIENTS

(Kenasaban antara Rasio Neutrofil/Limfosit dan C-Reactive Protein di asien Sepsis)

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ABSTRACT

Sepsis is a clinical syndrome characterized by a systemic response to infection which can rapidly lead to organ dysfunction and death. Sepsis is actually a normal reaction due to infection, but can last longer due to bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi. Similar clinical incidence is often encountered due to non-infection, such as trauma, surgery and burns.¹

INTRODUCTION

Sepsis is a clinical syndrome characterized by a systemic response to infection which can rapidly lead to organ dysfunction and death. Sepsis is actually a normal reaction due to infection, but can last longer due to bacteria, viruses, parasites or fungi. Similar clinical incidence is often encountered due to non-infection, such as trauma, surgery and burns.¹

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In the United States, the number of sepsis cases during the last decade has been as many as 750,000 people per year with a prevalence of three cases per 1,000 people. The improvement and development of pharmacotherapy and supportive care actually have increased survival rate. Unfortunately, mortality rate still ranges from 25% to 30% for severe sepsis and 40% to 70% for septic shock. Sepsis even has caused 20% of all deaths in hospitals in a year equal to the number of deaths caused by acute myocardial infarction.²

Sepsis ranked the third position of the most common diseases in the Dr. Soetomo Hospital in 2014. The incidence of sepsis in the Dr. Soetomo Hospital even has increased in the last 2 years. The incidence of sepsis was as many as 2446 cases in 2013 and 3,060 cases in 2014. The majority of sepsis cases was found in the age of 45–64 years. Death due to sepsis was 1653 out of 3060 cases (54%) during 2014 and 2446 out of 1487 cases (60.8%) in 2013.³

The American College of Chest Physicians and the Society of Critical Care Medicine Consensus Conference in 1991 proposed a definition of Systemic Inflammatory Response Syndrome (SIRS), sepsis and severe sepsis. This syndrome is a series of worsening inflammation, ranging from SIRS and developing into sepsis, severe sepsis, and septic shock. Criteria for SIRS are based on temperature, heart rate, respiratory rate and leukocyte count. At least two of four criteria must be met to determine SIRS. SIRS can frequently be triggered by either infections or non infections, such as burns, acute pancreatitis and trauma. Meanwhile, sepsis is defined based on SIRS criteria as well as suspected or proven infection. Severe sepsis is defined as sepsis accompanied by acute organ dysfunction.⁴

The 1991 consensus has limitations in defining sepsis, namely 2 of 4 SIRS criteria are not specific to sepsis. These criteria do not include biochemical markers, such as C-reactive protein, procalcitonin (PCT), or interleukin (IL)-6, often elevated in sepsis.⁴ In 2001, the Consensus Conference by the Society of Critical Care Medicine/European Society of Intensive Care Medicine/American College of Chest Physicians/ American Thoracic Society/Surgical Infection Society modified the definition of sepsis with certain criteria based on clinical and laboratory parameters as shown in Table 2. Nevertheless, the criteria of severe sepsis remains unchanged, namely sepsis with organ dysfunction. Septic shock is defined as persistent hypotension with a systolic blood pressure of <90 mm Hg or a mean arterial blood pressure of <70 mmHg, despite adequate fluid resuscitation.⁴,⁵

In addition, one of the physiological responses in the immune system against systemic inflammation is an increase in the number of neutrophils as well as a decrease in the number of lymphocytes. This is due to changes in the dynamics and regulation of apoptosis in a state of systemic inflammation when compared with non-inflammatory. The number of neutrophils and lymphocytes is also considered as parameters contained in CBC. CBC is an examination routinely performed in hospitals. For those reasons, many researches use simpler parameters, such as ratio of neutrophils/lymphocytes (RNL).⁷

The ratio of neutrophils/lymphocytes is an absolute number of neutrophils divided by an absolute number of lymphocytes. The ratio of neutrophil/lymphocyte under physiological conditions is 2: 1. In patients with sepsis, the ratio will increase.⁷

A research conducted by Gurol et al.⁸ entitled “Are There Standardized Cutoff Values for Neutrophil-Lymphocyte Ratios in bacteremia or sepsis?” aimed to determine the cutoff value of RNL based on the level of procalcitonin with a total sample of 1,468 patients with sepsis. The results of the research then showed that the cut-off value of less than 5 could be used to diagnose sepsis.⁸

C-Reactive Protein (CRP), moreover, is an acute phase protein formed in the liver (hepatocyte cells) due to inflammation or infection. CRP levels will increase within 4 to 6 hours. The levels are even doubled within 8 hours after inflammation. Peak concentration is achieved within 36 hours to 50 hours. CRP levels will continue to increase along with the inflammatory process and then will decrease rapidly when healing. This is because CRP has a half-life of 5 to 7 hours. In other words, CRP levels are in line with the degree of inflammation and the degree of healing. Therefore, CRP can be used to assess disease activity. The normal value of CRP is <5 mg/L. Thus, the value can be said to increase when the value obtained in the examination is more than the normal one.⁹,¹⁰

The pathophysiology of sepsis, furthermore, involves a complex interaction of proinflammatory and anti-inflammatory mediators in response to pathogen invasion. This mechanism then can lead to a damage to the endothelium, vascular permeability, microvascular dysfunction, coagulation activation pathway, and impaired tissue oxygenation resulting in a sepsis cascade.²

As a result, RNL value in this research is expected to have a strong correlation with CRP. Consequently, RNL may be used as one of the parameters later, replacing CRP in aiding diagnosis as well as monitoring therapy and supporting indicators of clinical improvement in patients with sepsis, especially in areas that have limited facilities.
The research subjects in this research were adult sepsis patients who came to the Installation of Emergency Unit, Dr. Soetomo Hospital from May 2015 to June 2015. Inclusion criteria were eligible patients with sepsis according to ACCP/SCCM Consensus Conference 2001 (see Table 1) as determined by peer specialists in the disease, at the age over 21 years, as well as willing to participate in this research and signed an informed consent. Meanwhile, exclusion criteria were patients consuming immunosuppressive drugs (steroids), having malignancy, receiving chemotherapy, refusing medical treatment and refusing to follow this research.

Next, the sampling technique in this research was performed using consecutive sampling with a sample size of at least 42 people. Statistical analysis then was conducted to see the correlation between RNL values and CRP levels in those patients with sepsis. The date obtained then were tabulated to be processed using Spearman's correlation. Afterwards, the data were analyzed using R program.
By using the above formula, the minimum number of samples in this research was 42 samples. After receiving approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Dr. Soetomo Hospital, patients who met the inclusion criteria were asked to have routine blood tests using ADVIA 2120i instrument to determine the value of neutrophils and lymphocytes to obtain the value of RNL, CRP levels, finally, were determined by using Achitect 4000.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The number of the research subjects were 42 patients, consisted of 25 males (59.52%) and 17 females (40.48%) with a mean age of 55.04 years and an age range of 29 years to 86 years. Similarly, a research conducted by Sark et al.\(^\text{11}\) also showed that females have a lower risk of sepsis than males. This was possibly related to their hormonal differences between the sexes that could contribute to the differences in their inflammatory response and sepsis. Increased estradiol in women is known to boost immune function and anti-inflammatory mediator dominance that may provide a protective effect.\(^\text{11,12}\)

In addition, all samples in this research were sepsis patients with different underlying diseases. The percentage of patients with sepsis caused by diabetes mellitus was very high, namely 15 cases (35.7%). Similarly, a research conducted by Koh et al.\(^\text{13}\) showed that patients with diabetes mellitus have an increased risk of infection and sepsis, about 20.1–22.7% of all patients with sepsis.\(^\text{13}\)

Diabetes mellitus is usually associated with increased susceptibility to infection and sepsis. This is due to the disruption of the host response, especially chemotaxis, adhesion of neutrophils, intracellular killing and defects in humoral immunity associated with hyperglycemia.\(^\text{13}\)

Based on the results of this research, moreover, the values of RNL increased in nearly all patients with sepsis, about 38 samples (90.5%). There were only 4 samples (9.5%) with normal RNL (<5). The range of RNL obtained was from 3.42 to 57.47 (with a mean of 21.74 and a standard deviation of 14.1). The lowest ratio of neutrophil/lymphocyte obtained was in sepsis patients with a diagnosis of type II diabetes mellitus, left multiple kidney stones, and urosepsis, while the highest RNL was found in sepsis patients with a diagnosis of type II diabetes mellitus and post-stroke with stage II hypertension.

The ratio of neutrophils/lymphocytes in this research increased in nearly all patients with sepsis, about 38 samples (90.5%). Similarly, a research reported by Gurol et al.\(^\text{8}\) showed an increase in the cutoff values of RNL in sepsis patients with a cut-off of more than 5, so it can be considered as a marker for sepsis that can be used to diagnose sepsis with a sensitivity of 57.8% and a specificity of 83.9%. Like the previous research, a research conducted by Lowsby et al.\(^\text{14}\) showed that RNL in bacteremia group was significantly higher than in the control group.\(^\text{8,14}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of samples</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>25 samples</td>
<td>(59.52)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>17 samples</td>
<td>(40.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (years), Mean±SD</td>
<td></td>
<td>55.04±14.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;45</td>
<td>9 samples</td>
<td>(21.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–65</td>
<td>21 samples</td>
<td>(50)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;65</td>
<td>12 samples</td>
<td>(28.58)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The diagnosis of underlying disease, n (%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes mellitus</td>
<td>15 samples</td>
<td>(35.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diabetes mellitus + diabetic nephropathy</td>
<td>8 samples</td>
<td>(19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community acquired pneumonia</td>
<td>5 samples</td>
<td>(11.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chronic kidney disease</td>
<td>4 samples</td>
<td>(9.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urinary tract infection</td>
<td>3 samples</td>
<td>(7.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cirrhosis</td>
<td>2 samples</td>
<td>(4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cholecystitis</td>
<td>1 sample</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute Cholangitis</td>
<td>1 sample</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acute pancreatitis</td>
<td>1 sample</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cerebrovascular attack thrombotic</td>
<td>1 sample</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peritoneal tuberculosis suspects</td>
<td>1 sample</td>
<td>(2.4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In this research, there were also four samples that had normal RNL values, but with high CRP levels. It may be possible because the patients that have been in a state of sepsis have already created depressed immune.

Furthermore, CRP levels obtained in this research increased in almost all patients with sepsis as many as 41 samples (97.6%) with an increase in CRP values up to above 5 mg/L. There was only one sample (2.4%) with a CRP value of <5 mg/L. The range of CRP values was from 1.22 to 361.86 (with a mean of 158 mg/L and a standard deviation of 97.4 mg/L). The lowest CRP levels were found in sepsis patients with a diagnosis of type II diabetes mellitus and ulcers pedis, while the highest CRP levels were found in sepsis patients with a diagnosis of type II diabetes mellitus and diabetic ketoacidosis (KAD).

Similarly, Gian Paolo et al.\textsuperscript{15} reported that CRP levels increased significantly in patients with infection compared with those without infection. Therefore, the levels of CRP were in accordance with the severity of organ function. The same results were also reported in a research conducted by Hong-Xiang et al.\textsuperscript{16}

Table 3 showed that the largest group (40.5%) was the samples of sepsis patients with RNL above 5 and CRP levels between 100–200. This indicated that sepsis in this research was most often caused by a bacterial infection. Similarly, a research conducted by Mayr, et al.\textsuperscript{4} showed that bacteria were the most common organisms causing sepsis.\textsuperscript{4,17}

One sample of sepsis patients in this research, nevertheless, had normal CRP levels. This is likely because the patient had taken antibiotics before. Another possibility is that the patient’s early normal CRP level could be very low (normal range is 0.08 mg/L–3.1 mg/L), so a 10× increase in the patient’s CRP level remained in the normal range.

Several researches have already proven that RNL and CRP are good markers for inflammation. Yong Xia et al.\textsuperscript{18}, for instance, reported that both RNL and CRP increased significantly in the group of bacteremia compared with the group of non-bacteremia. Another research conducted by Zahorec et al.\textsuperscript{19} on RNL as parameters quick and simple in patients with systemic inflammation and critical illness also showed that RNL can be considered as a simple parameter used to monitor the clinical status in patients with sepsis and systemic inflammation.\textsuperscript{17,19}

Therefore, it could be estimated that RNL and CRP in patients with sepsis will have a good correlation. The same opinion was delivered by Gunay et al.\textsuperscript{19} that there was a positive correlation between RNL and CRP in patients with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease test. This correlation test was conducted since the data from one of the variables analyzed, the RNL levels, were not normally distributed (p=0.008), whereas the data of CRP was normally distributed (p=0.29). The results of this correlation test showed that there was no correlation between RNL and CRP levels with a p value of 0.51.

Nevertheless, several researches have already proven that RNL and CRP are good markers for inflammation. Yong Xia et al.\textsuperscript{18}, for instance, reported that both RNL and CRP increased significantly in the group of bacteremia compared with the group of non-bacteremia. Another research conducted by Zahorec et al.\textsuperscript{19} on RNL as parameters quick and simple in patients with systemic inflammation and critical illness also showed that RNL can be considered as a simple parameter used to monitor the clinical status in patients with sepsis and systemic inflammation.\textsuperscript{17,19}

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Figure 1. Correlation between RNL and CRP levels (p=0.51).

| Table 3. CRP classification based on severity |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|--|
|               | <5 | 10–40 | 40–100 | 100–200 | >200 |
| RNL >5        | +  | 12 (28.5) | 1 (2.3%) | 4 (9.5%) | 17 (40.5%) |
|               | –  | 1 (2.3%) | 0 | 2 (4.7%) | 1 (2.3%) |

\textsuperscript{182} Indonesian Journal of Clinical Pathology and Medical Laboratory, 2017 March; 23(2): 178–183
considered as a disease with chronic inflammation. However, unlike the results of these previous researches, the results of this research showed that despite an increase in RNL and CRP levels, there was no correlation between RNL and CRP.

In the early phases of inflammation, tissue macrophages and monocytes in the circulation produces a wide range of monokines, one of which is IL-1. IL-1 causes the release of neutrophils from the bone marrow resulting in an increase in the number of neutrophils in the circulation. CRP activation then occurs through a different route, preceded by the activation of cellular defense. Next, IL-6 is secreted by the Th-1 stimulating hepatocytes to secrete CRP, while IL-1 and TNF-α produced by monocytes also stimulates hepatocytes to secrete CRP.

IL-1 is also known to induce the production of IL-6 leading to the higher production of IL-6. All these processes then lead to an increase in CRP that is not comparable to an increase in the number of neutrophils. This possibility leads to the absence of a correlation between RNL and CRP. Another possibility is that CRP levels have a wider range, while RNL has a narrower range. Thus, since the variation of the samples in this research was less wide, the samples were clustered only in certain areas.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Based on the results of this research, it can be concluded that there was no correlation between RNL and CRP. It may be due to differences in the activation pathway between neutrophil and CRP. As a result, an increase in CRP was not proportional to an increase in the number of neutrophils.

Consequently, further research needs to be conducted on larger samples with a longer study time, so more accurate data representing the population can be obtained to get more meaningful results. Besides, unification of basic clinical state of patients with sepsis and correlation of RNL and more specific parameters, such as procalcitonin, need to be conducted to give more perfect results.

REFERENCES


