

Subclinical Hypothyroidism May Spontaneously Revert to Euthyroidism in Elderly Patients Negative for TPO Antibodies

Somwaru LL, et al.

ANALYSIS AND COMMENTARY ● ● ● ● ●

This is the largest study of an elderly cohort that examined the natural history of subclinical hypothyroidism. The conclusions are likely to be valid even though for about 10% of the SH group sera was not available for testing at 2 years. The results are similar to the Spanish study of 107 patients over 55 years of age who had SH (4) that reported 37% of patients reverted to a euthyroid state during a follow-up of 6 months to 6 years; they also found that progression to overt hypothyroidism was related to the height of the baseline serum TSH.

In regard to therapy for SH, these data provide some reassurance that the current clinical practice of treating those with TSH levels >10 mU/L and positive anti-TPO is reasonable because these

patients are much more likely to progress to overt hypothyroidism.

Would the results be different if the upper limit of serum TSH was age-adjusted? If the upper TSH limit was in the range of 5 to 6 mU/L, then the population of those with SH would be smaller, especially the group with TSH levels of 4.5 to 6.9 mU/L who had the highest reversion to normal. Regardless of the cutoff for classification, those with mild elevations of serum TSH need to be retested before they are consigned to long-term therapy with levothyroxine. Another study by the Spanish group showed that a large majority of the normalization of the serum TSH occurred within the first 2 years of follow-up (5), a finding that is consistent with the current study.

— Jerome M. Hershman, MD

References

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