Overview of Systemic Lupus Erythematosus in Hong Kong Chinese: Part 2. Hormones, Pregnancy and Lactation

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Abstract: Systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE) is predominantly a women’s disease. The relative infrequency of the disease in men and in hypoestrogenemic women suggests that endogenous estrogen level may influence the expression of the disorder. A number of animal and in-vitro human studies have investigated the role of estrogens on disease activity of SLE. In the absence of prospective data, it is still unclear whether exogenous estrogens may exacerbate SLE. The relationship between pregnancy and lupus flares is also a subject of controversy but SLE patients should not be discouraged of having children. Lupus pregnancies are high risk pregnancies. Close collaboration with obstetricians and pediatricians is mandatory. A detailed pre-pregnancy counseling on the risk of maternal/fetal complications and congenital heart block should be conducted. Most of the medications used in SLE are excreted in breast milk and extra precautions should be taken. Appropriate contraceptive methods should be advised to lupus couples who do not plan for children.

Keywords: Estrogen, lupus, menopause, pregnancy, prolactin