

Original Research Article

Age-specific Serum Antimullerian Hormone Concentrations are Lower in Infertile Women AGE-

ABSTRACT

Aims: Antimullerian hormone (AMH) has been accepted as a marker for the size of the ovarian follicle pool. To interrupt the results of this testing, age-specific concentrations are needed. The purpose of this study is to compare antimullerian hormone (AMH) among infertile women ages 22 to 32 years experiencing regular menses with oocytes donors of the same age.

Study design: Cohort study

Place and Duration of Study: South Florida Institute for Reproductive Medicine, Miami, Florida and Reproductive Medicine Institute, Evanston, IL. Samples drawn between June 2008 and June 2012.

Methodology: 400 infertile women and 102 oocyte donors aged 19-40 years with a history of regular menses had blood drawn for determination of AMH concentration. Serum AMH was measured by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay using an AMH ELISA kit (Beckman Coulter, Chaska, MN, USA).

Results: When the mean +2 standard deviations of the serum AMH concentrations among infertile women with regular menses were compared with age-specific oocyte donors, a significant decrease among infertile women was noted at all age groups.

Conclusion: A significant proportion of infertile women have lower than average ovarian reserve, suggesting that serum AMH values reflect follicular supply somewhat independent of age.

Keywords: : antimullerian hormone, AMH, infertility, oocyte donor

INTRODUCTION

Antimullerian hormone (AMH) is a homodimeric disulfide-linked glycoprotein member of the transforming growth factor-beta superfamily with a molecular weight of 140kDa (1). In contrast to other members of the superfamily, AMH is expressed only on the gonads. In females, AMH is secreted by granulosa cells of growing follicles measuring 4-6mm in diameter (2) or follicles that have undergone recruitment from the primordial follicle pool but have not as yet been selected for dominance. The main physiologic role of AMH appears to be limitation of transition from primordial into growing follicles (3) as well as to diminish the responsiveness of growing follicles to follicle stimulating hormone (FSH)(4). By decreasing sensitivity to FSH, AMH limits the number of follicles that develop to the preovulatory stage (3). The ovary-specific expression pattern in granulosa cells of growing nonselected follicles makes AMH an ideal marker for the size of the ovarian follicle pool. Since AMH is secreted by the ovary into the circulation with little variation throughout, it has emerged as a marker of ovarian reserve and response to gonadotropin stimulation permitting the identification of both poor and hyper-response to gonadotropin administration (5-8). As a result, serum AMH testing in women is often obtained during the initial clinical evaluation at fertility centers. To interpret the results of this testing, age-specific concentrations are needed. While age specific values for circulating AMH concentrations have been reported for both regularly menstruating women (9) and infertile (10) populations, comparisons have not been made. The present study compares results of AMH concentrations among infertile women with age specific values in fertile women serving as oocyte donors

2. MATERIAL AND METHODS / EXPERIMENTAL DETAILS / METHODOLOGY

Patients

A total of 400 women with a history of infertility defined as unable to conceive after one year of unprotected intercourse had blood drawn for determination of AMH concentration. All women had a history of regular menses occurring every 28 to 30 days. Women with a diagnosis of polycystic ovarian disease were excluded from the study.

One hundred two (102) women participating as oocyte donors for in vitro fertilization (IVF) and embryo transfer programs served as fertile controls.

All women had blood drawn for serum AMH concentrations after informed consent.

AMH assay

Serum AMH was measured by enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay using an AMH ELISA kit (Beckman Coulter, Chaska, MN, USA). AMH values are presented as ng/ml (conversion factor to pmol/l=ng/ml x 7.143). The detection limit of the assay is 0.14 ng/ml; intra- and inter-assay coefficients of variation were 12.3% and 14.2%, respectively.

Statistical Analysis

Age-specific serum AMH concentrations among infertile women were compared with oocyte donors Welch's unpaired t tests. A P value of <0.05 was considered significant.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Of the 400 infertile women included in the study, 277 had a single diagnosis and 123 had multiple diagnoses for the cause of infertility. The single diagnoses included: low ovarian reserve (n=42), male factor (n=126), tubal (n=53), endometriosis (n=30) and unexplained (n=26). Among the multiple diagnoses were: male + low ovarian reserve (n=72), male + tubal (n=25), male + endometriosis (n=18) and low ovarian reserve +tubal (n=8).

The median and mean $\pm$ 2 standard deviations of the age- specific AMH concentrations among infertile women with regular menses and oocyte donors are shown in Figure 1. A significant difference was noted at all age groups.

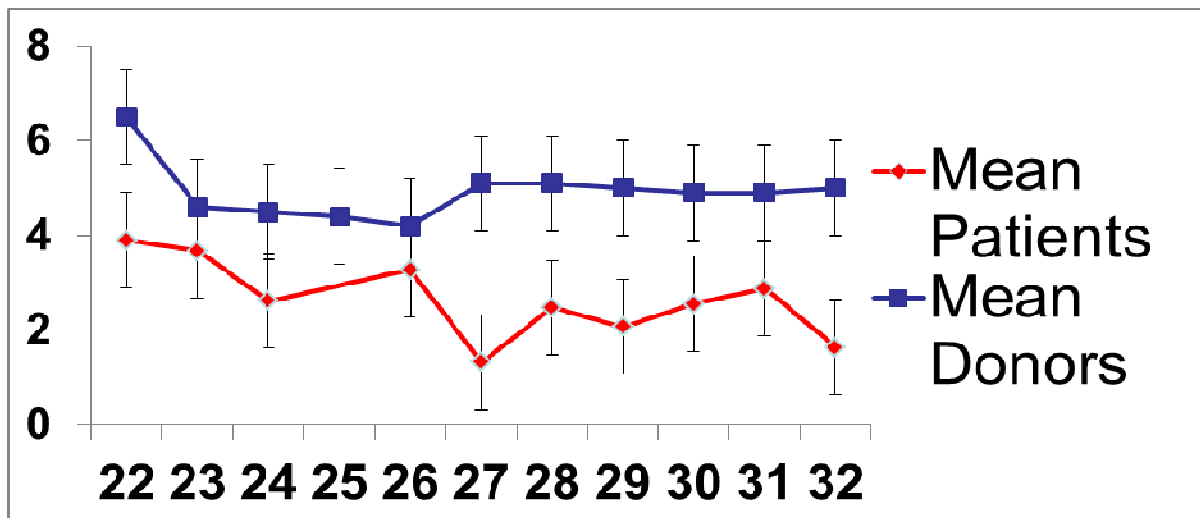


Figure 1. Mean $\pm$ 2 SD serum AMH concentrations (ng/ml) among 400 infertile women and 102 oocyte donors

Our data provide age-specific concentrations of serum AMH among infertile women who were menstruating regularly compared with oocyte donors. Since serum AMH concentrations fall with increasing age (Figure 1) (5,12,13), age – specific values are more accurate in predicting ovarian reserve than the normal values reported in the AMH assay kit. When AMH values from regularly menstruating women experiencing infertility were compared with those from the literature who were not infertile (9), a significant difference was noted for each age group. While the median values of serum AMH were significantly lower among women experiencing infertility compared with those who were not, a wide range of overlapping values was noted making an absolute cut off value for normal values for that age impossible. Nonetheless, the significant difference in median values between the two groups sheds light on the pathophysiology of unexplained infertility. A significant proportion of infertile women have lower than average reserve of ovarian follicles, suggesting that serum AMH values reflect follicular supply somewhat independent of age. The age-specific AMH values provided by the present study are lower than those previously reported by a larger study of 17,120 randomly selected serum specimens sent to a single reference laboratory from U.S. fertility centers located in 37 different states between 2007 and 2010 (10). In that report, age-specific values were not stratified based on menstrual history or diagnosis. Thus patients with a diagnosis of PCOS were included in the age-specific reference values. Since patients with PCOS have been reported as having increased serum AMH concentrations in previous studies (12) and confirmed in an age-specific manner in the current study, the differences in results can be explained.

In addition to being a marker for a diminishing ovarian follicle pool, serum AMH can also serve as a marker for an enlarged follicle pool such as seen in PCOS. Although the mechanisms leading to PCOS are still poorly understood, the common denominator is a disturbance in the selection of the dominant follicle resulting in oligo-anovulation. The defect in selection results in an accumulation of small antral follicles, which contribute significantly to the production of AMH. High serum AMH concentrations are associated with ovarian hyper-response and hyperstimulation syndrome (8,13). Thus, serum AMH concentration is a good marker for the extremes of ovarian reserve and age-specific values can be used to determine ovarian stimulation strategies (13). As in cycling women, AMH levels, decline with increasing age in PCOS (Figure 1a), albeit with higher AMH concentration at a given age compared with control (14) (Piltonen 2005).

Knowledge of age-specific AMH serum concentrations will help the clinician in identifying risk factors contributing to the cause of infertility and aid in determination of strategies for treatment of infertility including dosage of FSH for ovarian stimulation. It is hoped that in the future age-specific serum AMH levels will serve as one component among others to evaluate a woman's reproductive potential early in life so that prophylactic measures can be taken before a problem declares itself.

4. CONCLUSION;

A significant proportion of infertile women have lower than average ovarian reserve, suggesting that serum AMH values reflect follicular supply somewhat independent of age.

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ETHICAL APPROVAL (WHERE EVER APPLICABLE)

This study was approved by the Investigation review board of the Fertility and Cryogenic Laboratory # 002-11. All authors hereby declare that all experiments have been examined and approved by the appropriate ethics committee and have therefore been performed in accordance with the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki."

