Chopin’s Illness Revisited

To the Editor:

I was delighted to see that a couple of your readers challenged, as I did, who attributed Chopin’s illness to α1-antitrypsin deficiency, instead of tuberculosis, which was really what Chopin had and died of.

In reply to my letter, Kubba stated that “in an age when consumptive patients were committed to isolation homes, it seems unusual for Chopin, if he was thought to be consumptive, to have been cared for in the community.” Your readers might be interested in a quote from George Sand in René and Jean Dubos’ book, The White Plague. In Chapter 4, there are quotes from both Chopin and Sand from their stay in Majorca, Spain. Chopin’s statement refers to his hemoptysis, while Sand describes Majorca as a “magnificent country but most inhospitable.” The natives rightly believed consumption to be contagious! Furthermore, the sanatorium movement had not really gotten a good start by 1837 when Chopin died; “fingers” wandered around their homes and neighborhoods as they were able.

In the Nineteenth Century, it was either syphilis or tuberculosis that seemed to carry off so many geniuses. In Chopin’s case it was tuberculosis that stifled those fingers at the youthful age of 39.

Tsung O. Cheng, MD, FCCP
Professor of Medicine
George Washington University Medical Center
Washington, DC

REFERENCES

1 Margolis ML. The long suffering of Frederic Chopin, revisited [letter]. Chest 1998; 114:655
3 Cheng TO. Chopin’s illness [letter]. Chest 1998; 114:656
7 Greenberg B. Happy birthday to Chopin. All Things Considered, National Public Radio, February 22, 1998

Methacholine PC20 Extrapolation

To the Editor:

Inhalation challenge tests using direct nonselective bronchoconstrictor stimuli such as methacholine or histamine are widely used in the clinical assessment of airway responsiveness and research trials. The results are usually expressed as the provocative concentration or dose producing a 20% fall in FEV1 (PC20 or PD20), by interpolation of the last two data points on the log dose-response curve. It is uncertain how to best approximate the PC20 when the test is stopped before a 20% FEV1 fall has been achieved. One method is the extrapolation of PC20 from the last data point alone. Another method is to extrapolate the PC20 from the last two data points, as in the interpolation formula.

We compared these two ways of estimating PC20 with the interpolation by formula in a retrospective analysis of 100 methacholine or histamine bronchial challenge tests using the

![Figure 1. Comparison of conventional PC20 and PC20 estimated by two methods of linear extrapolation.](image-url)