



# Decipher me or I will devour you – Unraveling the enigma of chronic urticaria

*Decifra-me ou te devoro – desvendando o enigma da urticária crônica*

Fábio Chigres Kuschnir<sup>1</sup>

**D**ecipher me or I will devour you! This was the ultimatum that the sphinx of Thebes, in Ancient Greece, launched to travelers who intended to enter its domains. For those who did not solve the enigma proposed by the mystical creature, the outcome was tragic. Keeping due proportions, chronic urticaria (CU) has always been one of the great challenges of our specialty.

For doctors, specialists or not, the lack of robust evidence on the underlying pathophysiological mechanisms and the large number of possible triggers generated a large number of tests, important dietary restrictions and different therapeutic proposals, many of which focused on the use of high doses of first-generation antihistamines. Most of the time, these strategies proved to be ineffective in the adequate control of the so-called chronic idiopathic urticaria (ICU).<sup>1</sup>

For patients, in addition to the high socioeconomic cost and impact on quality of life due to the symptoms, limitations and side effects imposed by the treatment, it was common to observe an anxious pilgrimage to different medical services in search of the “cure” and origins of the disease.

As the knowledge in molecular mechanisms of ICU increased, especially from the studies of patients undergoing therapy with anti-IgE (omalizumab), it was possible to partially unravel the “enigma” and

confirm the hypothesis that a significant portion of cases of the disease was due to auto reactivity and/or autoimmunity, resulting in a nomenclature change to spontaneous chronic urticaria (CSU) in those cases with no specific trigger.<sup>2-4</sup>

These findings had a profound impact on the management of chronic urticaria and angioedema, enabling the development of new subclassifications based on disease biomarkers, as well as changes in clinical, laboratory and therapeutic approaches, widely disseminated through national and international guidelines.<sup>5-6</sup>

In this issue of *Arquivos Brasileiros de Asma, Alergia e Imunologia* (AAAI), the Scientific Department of Urticaria of the Brazilian Association of Allergy and Immunology presents a practical guide in a question/answer format on chronic urticaria in children, the elderly and pregnant women, patient groups considered even more challenging, due to the scarcity of studies in these groups.<sup>7</sup>

Also in this issue of the AAAI, the same Scientific Department addresses in a practical and objective way different aspects of acute urticaria which, despite its high prevalence, is still surrounded by myths, mainly on the part of patients and general practitioners, generating misconduct and fruitless searches by causal agents.<sup>8</sup>

1. AAAI Associate Editor. Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro - UERJ - Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil.

By revealing some of these “riddles”, the two documents help in the diagnostic and therapeutic approach and in the decision-making regarding the challenging urticaria cases that we face in our daily lives.

### References

1. Kaplan AP. Chronic urticaria: pathogenesis and treatment. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2004;114(3):465-74.
2. Kaplan AP, Joseph K, Maykut RJ, Geba GP, Zeldin RK. Treatment of chronic autoimmune urticaria with omalizumab. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2008;122(3):569-73.
3. Gober LM, Sterba PM, Eckman JA, Saini SS. Effect of anti IgE (omalizumab) in chronic idiopathic urticaria (CIU) patients. *J Allergy Clin Immunol.* 2008;121(2):5:147.
4. Sheikh J. Effect of omalizumab on patients with chronic urticaria: Issues with the determination of autoimmune urticaria. *Ann Allergy Asthma Immunol.* 2008;100(1):88-9.
5. Zuberbier T, Abdul Latiff AH, Abuzakouk M, Aquilina S, Asero R, Baker D, et al. The international EAACI/ GA<sup>2</sup>LEN/ EuroGuiDerm/ APAAACI guideline for the definition, classification, diagnosis, and management of urticaria. *Allergy.* 2022;77(3):734-66.
6. Ensina LF, Valle SOR, Campos RA, Agondi R, Criado P, Bedrikow RB, et al. Guia prático da Associação Brasileira de Alergia e Imunologia para o diagnóstico e tratamento das urticárias baseado em diretrizes internacionais. *Arq Asma Alerg Imunol.* 2019;3(4):382-92.
7. Brandão LS, Melo JML, Dias GA, Mansour E, Gonçalves RF, De-Alcântara CT, et al. Practical guide to urticaria for special patient groups. *Arq Asma Alerg Imunol.* 2022;6(2):197-213.
8. Alcântara CT, Raeder DFT, Campinhos FL, Brandão LS, Campos RA, Franca AT, et al. Practical guide to acute urticaria. *Arq Asma Alerg Imunol.* 2022;6(2):214-24.