NEUROLOGICAL PICTURE

Localised autonomic failure due to botulinum toxin injection

A 51 year old woman with a 20 year history of spasmodic torticollis was receiving injections of botulinum toxin initially into her right sternomastoid muscle. After each set of injections she complained of a mildly painful intermittent facial swelling and some dryness of her mouth. Bacteriological swabs from her parotid duct were negative but sialography showed a dilated duct system with no evidence of obstruction (sialectasis). Her symptoms subsequently became bilateral but were still related to each set of injections. Although sialectasis itself is a recognised cause of salivary stasis, it seems likely that local diffusion of toxin was precipitating symptoms initially on the right side by paralysing the smooth muscle of the salivary ducts. This is largely innervated by cholinergic parasympathetic fibres. This is an as yet undescribed side effect of botulinum toxin treatment although a dry mouth can occur and this is also seen with botulinum poisoning. The patient in this case elected to continue treatment, relieving her symptoms by massaging her parotid glands.

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