SHORT REPORT

Focal (segmental) dyshidrosis in syringomyelia

Kazumasa Sudo, Naoto Fujiki, Sachiko Tsuji, Minoru Ajiki, Takuya Higashi, Masaaki Niino, Seiji Kikuchi, Fumio Moriwaka, Kunio Tashiro

Abstract

The features or mechanisms of dyshidrosis have not been sufficiently clarified. Neither has the difference between hyperhidrosis and hypohidrosis. To clarify the features and mechanisms of dyshidrosis (hyperhidrosis and hypohidrosis) in syringomyelia, the clinical features focusing on hidrosis of 30 patients with syringomyelia and Chiari malformation located from a syringomyelia database were prospectively analysed. The patients were classified into three groups: eight patients (26.7%) had segmental hypohidrosis, 10 (33.3%) had segmental hyperhidrosis, and 12 (40.0%) had normohidrosis. We found that the Karnofsky functional status for the hyperhidrosis and normohidrosis groups were significantly higher than for the hypohidrosis group (p=0.0012), with no significant differences between the hyperhidrosis and normohidrosis groups. The duration from the onset of syringomyelia to the current dyshidrosis was significantly longer in the hypohidrosis group than in the hyperhidrosis group (p=0.0027). A significant correlation was identified between the duration from the onset of syringomyelia to the time at study and the performance score (r=-0.599, p=0.0003). The results substantiate previous hypotheses that in its early stage syringomyelia causes segmental hyperactivity of the sympathetic preganglionic neurons, and hyperactivity of these gradually subsides as tissue damage progresses. Focal hyperhidrosis may be regarded as a hallmark of a relatively intact spinal cord, as well as normohidrosis.

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Keywords: syringomyelia; Chiari malformation; dyshidrosis; sympathetic preganglionic neuron

Methods

Patients and Methods

We have stored clinical data of a consecutive 34 patients (0.28%) with MRI confirmed syringomyelia and Chiari malformation among the 11 967 outpatients who visited our neurology clinic from April 1989 to November 1996. Three quarters of the patients came without referral, and a quarter came with referral. Our outpatient clinic is not only a primary but also a secondary and tertiary centre for diagnosis and treatment of all neurological disorders. The case records of each patient showed that there had been no referral bias to our clinic as a consequence of our interest in dyshidrosis in syringomyelia. The protocol includes items for the autonomic nervous system as well as other systems. The data were obtained prospectively, with the intention of avoiding any predestination bias, according to a protocol for examining patients with syringomyelia, which we ourselves designed. At the time of registration for this study, we obtained informed consent from patients to enter their information into our study database. Four of the 34 patients were dropped from the study because they refused to give us permission to employ clinical information about themselves for any clinical study; this left 30 patients. Twelve of these patients were operated on for syringomyelia, and we completed entering their information at the time of the operation.

Protocol for Examining Dyshidrosis

We obtained detailed clinical information for each patient, including their previous experience of hidrosis. A structured protocol was used to examine the state of hidrosis: step 1 asking about the nature and distribution of the hidrosis and the effects of room temperature, exercise, clothing, psychological burdens, food, etc; step 2 examining the state of hidrosis by observation, manual examination, and drawing a metal spoon across the surface of the skin (spoon test) either after adequate physical exercise or when lying in a bed warmed in advance by electric blankets. When further investigation was necessary to clarify the nature and distribution of dyshidrosis, the following steps were performed; step 3 a thermography in a room at a temperature of 21–28°C; step 4 hidrosis examination (the iodine-starch method) at a room temperature of 45–50°C, or in a bed warmed in advance. Consequently we
performed thermography in 16 patients, and the iodine-starch method in nine patients. We assessed the performance status by Karnofsky performance score (K score); this ranges from 0 to 100, and the higher the score, the better the performance.\textsuperscript{13}

CASE RECORDS
(See also our previous case records for three patients with hyperhidrosis\textsuperscript{14}).

Patient 18 (hyperhidrosis; 37 year old woman) had a 7 month history of persistent hyperhidrosis and pain in the left upper quadrant of the body. There was no muscle weakness or atrophy. Thermography showed low temperature in the left upper quadrant, which was consistent with hyperhidrosis of the area (figure A). She underwent an operation (a syringosubarachnoid shunt) 7 months after onset, after which hyperhidrosis and pain subsided within a week, as indicated by thermography (figure B).

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS
We performed a statistical analysis of five factors (age at time of study, age of onset of symptoms, duration from onset of symptoms to time of study, K score, and duration of follow up period) for the three groups of patients (hyperhidrosis, normohidrosis, and hypohidrosis) by one way factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) (Fisher’s PLSD method as a post hoc test), and for two factors (age of onset of current dyshidrosis and duration from onset of symptoms to current dyshidrosis) between the two groups of patients (hyperhidrosis and hypohidrosis) by non-paired \textit{t} test. We then obtained the Pearson’s correlation coefficient for duration from onset of symptoms to time of study, and K score for all 30 patients.

Results
Of the 30 patients, eight (26.7%) had hypohidrosis, 10 (33.3%) had segmental hyperhidrosis, and 12 (40%) had normohidrosis. In all patients, the distribution of dyshidrosis corresponded with the location of the syrinx and other neurological manifestations; the syrinx was located roughly in the region from the central canal to the unilateral (or sometimes bilateral with asymmetry) posterior angle of the spinal cord.

We have summarised the results of the statistical analyses in the table. Although we

<table>
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<th>Item</th>
<th>Hypohidrosis</th>
<th>Hyperhidrosis</th>
<th>Normohidrosis</th>
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*One way factorial ANOVA (Fisher’s PLSD method).
†Non-paired \textit{t} test.
§Statistically significant.
\(\parallel\) \(p\) value for each pair of items: hyperhidrosis \(\triangleleft\) hypohidrosis 0.1148; hyperhidrosis \(\triangleleft\) normohidrosis 0.0078; normohidrosis \(\triangleleft\) hypohidrosis 0.2194.
\(\star\) \(p\) value for each pair of items: hyperhidrosis \(\triangleleft\) hyperhidrosis 0.0007; hypohidrosis \(\triangleleft\) normohidrosis 0.7282; normohidrosis \(\triangleleft\) hypohidrosis 0.0012.
ourselves were not able to confirm any change in the features of hidrosis during the follow-up period, the clinical histories of five patients indicated that hidrosis decreased segmentally or diffusely over a long period. Duration from onset of symptoms to study was significantly longer in the hypohidrosis group than in the hyperhidrosis group (ANOVA; \(F(2, 27)=8.765, p=0.0012\)), with no significant difference between the hyperhidrosis and normohidrosis groups (\(p=0.7282\)). Duration from onset of symptoms to current dyshidrosis was significantly longer in the hypohidrosis than in the hyperhidrosis group (\(p=0.0027\)). There were no significant differences between hidrosis groups in the other factors. A significant correlation between the two items (duration from onset of symptoms to study, and K score) was recognised (\(r=-0.599, n=30, p=0.0003\)).

Discussion

We performed a MEDLINE search for publications dealing with dyshidrosis in syringomyelia between January 1966 and June 1997, with a language limitation of English, German, and French. This search confirmed the scant accumulation of information regarding dyshidrosis in syringomyelia; we were able to locate only four cases accompanied by Chiari malformation (three of which we have already reported and are currently included in this study).

We previously speculated that hyperhidrosis is caused by stimulation of sympathetic preganglionic neurons (SPGNs) rather than interference to the inhibitory tract.\(^1\) This is equivalent to the hypothesis regarding body hypertrophy which we recently presented.\(^4\) Later, disinhibition of the inhibitory local interneurons (ILINs), which are located in the vicinity of SPGNs, was supposed to be the cause of segmental hyperactivity of the SPGNs.\(^1\) When, in the clinical course of syringomyelia, slowly progressive tissue damage around the syrinx reaches the lateral horn, it will segmentally affect the SPGNs or adjacent structures.\(^1\) This time our results have shown, from the viewpoint of sweating, that there evidently is a hyperactivity of the SPGNs as long as the disability is mild; however, as the disability progresses, the hyperactivity gradually decreases and is replaced by hypoactivity (table).

We have a choice of two possibilities for the mechanism responsible for the hyperactivity of the SPGNs so far; the first is that the SPGNs are stimulated directly by a minimal tissue damage; the second is damage to the ILINS (preceding the damage to the SPGNs)—we have recently acquired some knowledge of these ILINS.\(^1\) In either case, as the disease progresses, hyperactivity will shift to normoactivity and finally to hypoactivity because of progressive and irreversible damage to the SPGNs, consistent with the clinical history of five of our patients with hypohidrosis. By contrast, immediate resolution of hyperhidrosis after decompression of the syrinx in patients whose disability was minimal, showed that the damage to the SPGNs was mild and tends to be reversible in patients with mild disability (figure). Before we reached the above hypothesis for the mechanism of hyperhidrosis, we had ruled out the possibility of interference to the inhibitory tract that connects the upper centre and the SPGNs as before because of the segmental distribution of hyperhidrosis and because of the locational relation among the syrinx, inhibitory tracts, and SPGNs.\(^4\)

Current results substantiate previous speculation about the mechanism of and relation between hyperhidrosis and hypohidrosis in syringomyelia.\(^5\) We now think that, in syringomyelia, focal hyperhidrosis can be regarded as a hallmark of a relatively intact—even though slightly damaged—spinal cord. We also think that, in syringomyelia, some part of normohidrosis is associated with a considerable amount of spinal cord damage. We propose that in diagnosing focal dyshidrosis, more attention should be given to the possibility of syringomyelia.

We are indebted to Drs Kazutoshi Hida, Yoshinobu Iwasaki, and Hiroshi Abe (Department of Neurosurgery, Hokkaido University School of Medicine) for their help in providing us with clinical information regarding surgical treatment. This study was supported by Research Grant (3B-5) for Nervous and Mental Disorders, from the Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare.

LETTERS TO
THE EDITOR

Behavioural status during the intracarotid amobarbital procedure (Wada test): relevance for surgical management

Presurgical evaluation in many epilepsy programmes often includes the intracarotid amobarbital procedure (IAP). Sodium amytal is injected into the internal carotid artery to produce a temporary “pharmacological paralysis” of hemispheric function. Traditionally, the IAP has been employed in patients with refractory frontal lobe epilepsy being considered for anterior temporal lobectomy. In these cases it is used to determine cerebral dominance for language,1 to assess the risk of severe postsurgical amnesia, and to predict postsurgical material specific memory changes.2 More recently, the use of the IAP has been extended to compliment EEG localisation and radiological data by lateralisating temporal lobe dysfunction.3

We report a case of frontal lobe epilepsy in which the IAP played a hitherto unrecognised role in patients with refractory frontal lobe epilepsy being considered for frontal lobectomy. Specifically, observation of behavioural function during the period of the ablation may provide useful information about the integrity of the contralateral frontal lobe. This is particularly relevant in those candidates with a history of cerebral trauma in whom damage to the bifrontal lobe is known or suspected. A review of the IAP studies performed on patients with temporal lobe epilepsy in our comprehensive epilepsy programme (1991–8) suggests that the emergence of frontal lobe behavioural features is common in patients in whom the anatomy leads to the suspicion of bifrontal compromise (for example, a history of traumatic head injury). By contrast, these features rarely occur in cases of non-traumatic aetiology, in which the integrity of frontal lobe systems is presumed. Although it remains an incidental finding in the context of determining the suitability of a candidate for anterior temporal lobectomy, this outcome may have potential implications for the selection of patients for frontal lobectomy.

We report a case of frontal lobe epilepsy secondary to a traumatic head injury. Out of concern for untoward postoperative behavioural change, we employed the IAP in an attempt to predict the risk of a frontal lobe syndrome.

A 39 year old man had a 23 year history of severe refractory epilepsy. The seizures postdated a road traffic accident at the age of 12 years when he sustained a head injury with an ill defined period of loss of consciousness. Seizures commenced within months of that injury and, although initially well controlled, became refractory within a few years. The seizure types included staring spells, violent tonic-clonic seizures, and tonic drop attacks. He had complications from his epilepsy including a fractured jaw, two episodes of severe burning due to seizures while showering, multiple episodes of postictal confusion and probable postictal psychosis, a lung abscess secondary to aspiration, and episodes of status epilepticus. Interictal EEG showed a bilateral generalised spike and wave discharges at around 2 Hz-2.5 Hz with some mild increase in bilateral slow activity and no convincing evidence of electrographic focalisation. Video EEG monitoring showed apparent generalised seizures without any focal onset on scalp EEG. Brain MRI disclosed a well defined atrophic lesion involving the left frontal lobe, which was considered likely to be post-traumatic in origin. Interictal FDG PET and HMPO SPECT disclosed hyperfusion in the left anterior frontal region commensurate with the abnormality shown on MRI. Although his electroclinical pattern was suggestive of symptomatic generalised epilepsy, because of the left frontal lesion, seizure onset from that region was considered likely.

On neuropsychological examination, his general cognitive performance was normal. At a behavioural level, however, he presented as very peevish in manner with a very rigid, inflexible cognitive style. The neuropsychological opinion was of a mild frontal lobe syndrome consistent with the history of traumatic head injury. There was no current evidence of psychiatric disorder. Although having successfully passed his final year of secondary school (together with several courses of advanced education), he had remained unemployed due to his seizures. He was socially isolated and his interpersonal relationships were limited.

He had severe life threatening epilepsy with the surgical evaluation remaining unresolved at the time of treatment. However, as surgical management would involve resection of the left frontal lobe against a background of traumatic head injury and the possibility of more generalised frontal lobe dysfunction, a left hemispheric IAP was performed. Sodium amytal (125 mg) was administered via a slow hand injection. Of relevance, no crossflow into the contralateral anterior cerebral artery via the anterior communicating artery was present (as assessed by a separate injection of contrast medium). The injection was accompanied by a dense right hemiplegia and global aphasic arrest. Resolution of language was characterised by a dense perseveration of counting which could not be influenced by the examiner. Despite normal comprehension, he showed severely impaired capacity for motor generation (including speech), together with marked behavioural disinhibition (agitation, swarming, verbosity, childishness). Although seemingly aware of some aspects of his behaviour (apologising for swearing), he seemed unable to modify his responses. The overall impression was of a pronounced frontal lobe syndrome, suggesting that the right frontal lobe had incurred some damage secondary to the documented head trauma and that he must have been reliant on some left frontal contribution.

On the basis of the IAP findings, a selective cortical resection (as opposed to more extensive frontal lobectomy) restricted to the region of damage was advised. Intraoperative electrocorticography showed active focal epileptiform discharges maximal in the inferior frontal lobe in the electrodes closest to the lesion. A cortical resection was performed with frameless stereotaxy guidance excision of the frontal lesion. Histopathology on the resected tissue showed an old post-traumatic cyst involving the cortex and white matter. His postoperative course was unremarkable. When reviewed 3 months after surgery he was seizure free. His performance on neuropsychological evaluation remained commensurate with presurgical status. There were no novel subjective complaints. Mood, behaviour, and temperament remained stable.

Despite its undoubtedly value in many individual cases of temporal lobe epilepsy, the IAP has remained a controversial assessment instrument.1 Amid this controversy its potential usefulness in other patient groups seems to have been overlooked. A primary criticism of its use in temporal lobe epilepsy has been the extent of the damage in the patient with frontal lobe epilepsy, as the region of interest is clearly ablated via supply from the carotid arterial system. Caution must, however, be exercised with respect to possible crossflow into the deep medial temporalelo cerebral artery via the anterior communicating artery. When such crossflow is present, the ability to assess validity the integrity of contralateral frontal lobe function will be confounded by virtue of indirect functional memory change.2

It should be borne in mind that the degree of frontal lobe dysfunction induced by the IAP represents the “worst case scenario” as the entire frontal lobe is included in the ablation. There are likely to be few surgical scenarios in which a comparable extensive resection of tissue is likely to be considered, and results must be interpreted in this context. This limitation notwithstanding, the IAP does seem to have a role in separating out those patients in whom more extensive frontal lobe resections could be considered, opposed to those in whom a more conserva- tive approach is warranted.

This case report forms only the basis for a novel hypothesis that clearly requires more rigorous scientific research before its clinical utility can be reliably established. Nonetheless, we think that it is worth drawing the attention of the epilopaological community to the potential application of the IAP in the surgical management of extratemporal cases.

MARIE F O’SHEA
MICHAEL M SALING
Department of Neuropsychology

SAMUEL F BERKOVIC
Department of Neurology, Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre, Melbourne, Australia; and Department of Medicine, University of Melbourne, Grattan Street, Parkville 3052, Australia.

Correspondence to: Dr Marie F O’Shea, Department of Neuropsychology, Austin and Repatriation Medical Centre (Aust Campus), Studley Road, Heidelberg, Victoria 3084, Australia. Telephone 613 3 03 9496 5913; Fax 613 3 03 9457 2654.

Reversal of tetrabenazine induced depression by selective noradrenaline (norepinephrine) reuptake inhibitor

Tetrabenazine (TBZ), a synthetic benzooquinolizine, was first introduced as a neuroleptic agent in 1960, and is now widely used in the treatment of hyperkinetic movement disorders such as chorea, tics, or tardive dyskinesia. The side effect profile is mainly characterised by the triad of drowsiness/fatigue, parkinsonism, and depression; depression is found in about 15% of patients treated with TBZ.1 We here report on the rapid reversal of depressive symptoms in a patient treated with TBZ for orofacial dystonia by administering the newly and highly selective noradrenaline (norepinephrine) reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) reboxetine.2

On admission, the 64 year old woman presented with perioral and lingual hyperkinesias as well as intermittent and involuntary movements of her lower jaw, which had lasted for about 2 years, causing her a considerable impairment of her diet. No history of neuroleptic treatment or Parkinson’s disease was evident. Her cranial CT and blood chemistry were normal. We diagnosed a segmental dystonia, which improved dramatically after a few days of a tetrabenazine medication (60 mg a day). This successful treatment response, however, was accompanied by a severe depressive syndrome, which was characterized by a mixed, anxious-depressive mood, low self esteem, a complete loss of drive, and intermittent suicidal ideations. After switching from TBZ to tiapride, the patient recovered from depression, but her neurological status worsened significantly. The re-exposure to TBZ again ameliorated hyperkinesia, but provoked a depressive relapse. A comedication with reboxetine (6 mg/day), a new and selective serotonin-norepinephrine reuptake inhibitor (SNRI) reboxetine, finally led to a stable remission of the depressive symptoms within a week, without any worsening of the dystonic syndrome.

Tetrabenazine (TBZ) is known as a monoamine oxidase inhibitor and dopamine receptor blocking drug.1 In more detail, TBZ binds to and inhibits specifically the human vesicular monoamine transporter isoform 2 (VMAT2). Whereas the indolamine serotoninergic neurotransmission forms a similar affinity for both VMAT1 and VMAT2, catecholamines such as noradrenaline exhibit a threefold higher affinity for VMAT2.2 As these specific transporters are responsible for packaging monoamine neurotransmitters into presynaptic secretory vesicles for release by exocytosis, the inhibition of VMAT2 by compounds such as tetrabenazine thus results in consecutive noradrenaline depletion.3

Alterations of noradrenergic neurotransmission—that is, a neuronal noradrenaline depletion—can therefore be postulated to form one major origin of TBZ induced depressive syndrome with this assumption, brain-specific catecholaminergic activity enhancers (CAEs) such as phenylephrine have been shown to antagonize TBZ induced depression-like behaviour in rats.4 Modulating this altered noradrenergic neurotransmission pattern by the administration of selective noradrenaline reuptake inhibitors such as reboxetine may thus provide a new, specific, and fast acting tool in the management of depression caused by TBZ and related (neuroleptic) compounds.

WOLFGANG SCHREIBER
JURGEN-CHRISTIAN KRIEG
Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Philipps-Universität, Rudolf-Bultmann-Straße 8, D-35033 Marburg/Lahn, Germany

TOBIAS EICHHORN
Department of Neurology, Philipps-Universität, Rudolf-Bultmann-Straße 8, D-35033 Marburg/Lahn, Germany

Correspondence to: Dr Wolfgang Schreiber, Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy, Philipps-Universität, Rudolf-Bultmann-Straße 8, D-35033 Marburg/Lahn, Germany. Telephone 0049 6421 284379, Fax 0049 6421 284329, email schreibe@mailer.uni-marburg.de


Spinal sulcal artery syndrome due to spontaneous bilateral vertebral artery dissection

In young adults vertebral artery dissection (VAD) is an important cause of brain infarction.1,2 A known mechanism is microtrauma due to abrupt head movements for example, chiropractic manoeuvres. In addition a pathogenetic role of connective tissue diseases, cystic media necrosis, fibromuscular dysplasia, migraine, and inflammatory diseases has been postulated.1 In VAD initial neck pain is often reported which may be slight. Lesions caused by VAD are cerebellar or brainstem infarcts, unilateral or bilateral thalamic infarcts (top of the basilar syndrome), or infarctions in the posterior cerebral artery territory due to intra-arterial embolism or haemodynamic decompensation when collaterals are insufficient.2 Lesions of the cervical spinal cord are rare because of its good collateral supply.3 We report on a patient with a syndrome of the spinal sulcal artery (incomplete Brown-Séquard syndrome) caused by spontaneous bilateral VAD.

A 43 year old man with a history of arterial hypertension presented with left sided numbness sparing the face, which had evolved suddenly while he was walking. In addition, he reported on dull right sided neck pain irradiating into the occiput, which had been initiated by a head rotation while he was working at a computer 2 weeks before. The neck pain had spontaneously ceased 6 days later. Neurological examination disclosed dissociated sensation defect on the left with an indistinct level around C4 to C6. Below this level on the left he had a marked hypalgesia and nearly a loss of temperature sense. The right limbs were warmer than the left ones. In addition, we found mild right sided motor system deficits. Cranial nerve function was intact, despite a right sided Horner’s syndrome. According to chest radiography phrenic nerve function was preserved. Routine laboratory findings including CSF analysis were normal. The hemiparesis and the different temperature sensation in the limbs resolved completely within 3 weeks.

Tibial nerve somatosensory evoked potentials (SSEPs) had regular N22 and P40 latencies and amplitudes. Central motor conduction time (CMCT) of the transcranial magnetic stimulation was prolonged to the right abductor digiti minimi (9.2 ms) and tibialis anterior (23.1 ms). The CMCT to the left target muscles was normal. Duplex sonography showed increased flow velocity on the level of the cervical vertebrae 3 to 5 with a maximum of 214 cm/s in the right and 197 cm/s in the left vertebral artery. Colour mode showed irregular narrowings of the lumen indicating dissections.

Cervical MRI showed a spinal cord infarction at the level C2 (figure). The circumference and dorsal part of the cord were not affected. In digital subtraction angiography (DSA) both vertebral arteries had string signs in the V1 and V2 segments with collateral flow to the distal V2–4 segments via the thyrocervical trunk (cervical ascending artery) and the costocervical trunk also. The anterior spinal artery was incompletely contrasted by unilateral spinal branches of the right vertebral artery. They originated at the level of dissection. The intradural origins of the anterior spinal artery (CMCA) of the V4 segments were not visible.

Bilateral spontaneous VAD is not rare, but often missed. In most cases, microtrauma preceding the dissection can be recalled by the patients. Due to the mild mechanical impact, the action of predisposing factors might be postulated. Among these may be changing in type III collagen, migraine, fibromuscular dysplasia, infections in the near past, and inflammatory vasculopathy.1 Magnetic resonance imaging with typical semilunar mural haematoma and in addition magnetic resonance angiography (MRA) with complementary documentation of an irregular lumen or tapering occlusion have a high sensitivity and specificity in cases of internal carotid artery dissection.1,3 By contrast, mural haematomas of the VA especially in the V1 and the V3 segments are often not detectable by MRI. In cases of unclear non-invasive findings, DSA is still the method of choice.4

In addition to consecutive brain infarctions, cervical spinal cord infarctions and nerve root compression syndromes may occur in cases of unilateral or bilateral VAD. Probably as a result of the pial collateral network and the dual posterior spinal artery, spi...
American descent with a strong founder effect.\textsuperscript{13} Around 50% of non-Hispano-American families showed linkage to \textit{CCM1} but no common haplotype was found.\textsuperscript{14} A recent study showed linkage of cerebral cavernous malformations to two additional loci.\textsuperscript{4} No Spanish family with cerebral cavernous malformations has been analysed so far.

We report herein a genetic linkage analysis conducted on nine Spanish families with cerebral cavernous malformations. All procedures were approved by an ethics committee. The families were unrelated and originated from different regions of Spain (south west (CVE2, 3, 4, 10, 17, 25), central (CVE24), south east (CVE28), and north east (CVE29)). Seventy seven subjects including 55 potentially informative meioses and 12 spouses gave their informed consent. They were examined by a board certified neurologist, underwent cerebral MRI, and blood samples were taken. Magnetic resonance imaging was used to establish status for linkage analysis. Thirty four members had MRI diagnosis of cavernomas and were considered as affected. Among them, 14 experienced neurological symptoms (cerebral haemorrhage n=6, seizures n=8). Nineteen members with normal cerebral MRI were considered as healthy. Twelve members without MRI investigation had an unknown status. Analysis of pedigrees was consistent with an

(A) Pedigrees of the nine families with cerebral cavernous malformations. Black symbols=symptomatic patients with cavernous angiomas on MRI; half filled symbols=asymptomatic members with cavernous angiomas on MRI; empty symbols=asymptomatic members with normal MRI; question mark=members with unknown status. (B) Comparison of the Hispano-American \textit{CCM1} haplotype and the haplotypes segregating with the disease phenotype within Spanish families. Polyomorph bars are shown on the left. Numbers indicate the sizes in base pairs. Primers used to amplify D7S2409 were different from those in the Hispano-American families resulting in a different size of the amplified fragment. M65B was not studied in the Hispano-American families. Family CVE24 was not informative for D7S646. For families CVE17 and CVE29, the two haplotypes of the affected siblings are indicated. ND=not determined.
cerebral cavernous malformations, this haplotype is more likely not predominant in Spain, and the strong founder effect seen in all published Hispano-American families with cerebral cavernous malformations might be specific for this population.

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H H JUNG
P LABAUGE
S LABERGE
E MARECHAL
E TOURNIER-LASSEERVE
INSERM U25, Faculté de Médecine Necker, Paris, France

M LUCAS
Laboratorio de Biología Molecular
J M GARCIA-MORENO
M A GAMERO
G IZQUIERDO
Servicio de Neurologia, Hospital Universitario Virgen Macarena, Avenida Dr Fedrani, 41017 Sevilla, Spain

E TOURNIER-LASSEERVE
Hôpital Lariboisière, Paris, France

Correspondence to: E Tournier-Lasserve, INSERM U25, Faculté de Médecine Necker, 156 Rue de Vaugirard, 75015 Paris, France. Telephone 0033 1 45 67 25 97; fax 0033 1 40 56 01 07; email: tournier@necker.fr


Hydrocephalus caused by metastatic brain lesions: treatment by third ventriculostomy

Metastasis to the brain occurs in 20%–40% of cancer patients.1 About 20% of these metastases are located in the posterior fossa, cerebellum, and brainstem. Metastatic disease to pereventricular brain tissue can obstruct the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) produced in the ventricles to the subarachnoid space where it is normally absorbed by arachnoid granulations. This typically causes an obstructive or non-communication hydrocepha-
lus. Thus, a ventricular valve has customarily been placed to drain CSF from a lateral ventricle through a pressure regulating valve and into the atrium or peritoneal or pleural cavity. Even though this technique has been successful in relieving the hydrocephalus, it has about a 50% chance of infection or failure from blockage.2

Another option for the treatment of obstructive hydrocephalus is third ventriculostomy, a minimal invasive endoscopic neu-
rosurgical procedure. In performing third ventriculostomy, a hole is created in the floor of the third ventricle, allowing CSF inside the ventricle to drain out to the CSF space surrounding the brain. Although third ventriculostomy has a low operative morbidity and a high probability of success, hydrocephalus is, it is only commonly used on patients with aqueductal stenosis and the pediatric population. To avoid placing shunts in patients with inoperable metastatic brain tumours who typically have only a few months to live, we have offered the patients third ventriculostomy as a palliative proce-
dure.

We performed third ventriculostomy on seven patients with hydrocephalus due to metastatic tumours of the posterior fossa or thalamus. They typically presented with symptoms of acute hydrocephalus in addition to any local mass effect of the tumour. Postoperatively, five patients were relieved of hydrocephalic symptoms and follow up brain imaging studies disclosed decreased ventricu-
lar size. These five patients had a median hospital time of 6.5 days and median survival of 5 weeks after the operation. The third ventriculostomy had been prolonged by care of their primary disease. However, most of our patients who underwent this operation for hydrocephalus caused by other diseases were discharged from the hospital with alive with metastatic disease after between 4 and 48 hours from the procedure. There were no operative complications. All five patients had no evidence of redevelopment of hydrocephalus up to the last clinic visit.

The remaining two patients had unsuccessful results from their third ventriculostomy. One patient (case 4) showed no change from his initial neurological exam after the procedure, but his mental status deteriorated on post operative day 6. Brain CT showed no change in the size of his ventricles compared with the scan obtained on the day of admission. The patient's family requested comfort care only and the patient died 2 days later. In the second case (case 6) the patient had improve-
ment in his neurological examination and ventricle size by CT scan immediately after the operation, but had recurrent symptoms of hydrocephalus 11 days later. After placement of a ventriculoperitoneal shunt, his examina-
tion returned to baseline.

Every patient except the person described in case 4 received brain radiation therapy after the palliative procedure. One patient (case 3) underwent a course of radiotherapy treatment prior to the operation. Another (case 5) had radiation to her orbit in the dis-
tant past after enucleation for retinoblas-
toma. Even though previous radiotherapy may be considered a contraindication for third ventriculostomy by some authors, it did not seem to affect the success of third ventricu-
lostomy in our patients. Carcinomatous menin-
ges which could have caused a contri-
tent communicating hydrocephalus was not grossly evident on examination, on any of the brain imagnings, or during endoscopy. However, tumours in contact with CSF space can also cause a communication deficit by raising CSF protein which can obstruct the CSF space. This is probably the pathogenesis in patients with inoperable metastatic brain disease. As a result, the patients who underwent this procedure had a median hospital stay of 6.5 days and median survival of 5 weeks after the operation. The third ventriculostomy was, however, prolonged by care of their primary disease. However, most of our patients who underwent this operation for hydrocephalus caused by other diseases were discharged from the hospital with alive with metastatic disease after between 4 and 48 hours from the procedure. There were no operative complications. All five patients had no evidence of redevelopment of hydrocephalus up to the last clinic visit.
as 50%, with the highest failure rate in the first few months after shunt placement. The complication rates for both procedures are low. Third ventriculostomy and shunting can potentially cause a stroke, bleeding, ventriculitis, meningitis, a subdural haematoma, CSF leak, diabetes insipidus, and SIADH. However, shunting has additional risks of mechanical malfunction, complications associated with implanting a foreign body, and overdrainage syndrome.

Because third ventriculostomy restores near normal CSF dynamics, overdrainage is prevented. The procedure is also minimally invasive and safe. The procedure’s low morbidity, high efficacy, and potentially short hospital stay are well suited as a palliative treatment of hydrocephalus for patients with an expected shortened life span. We propose that third ventriculostomy should be offered as a first treatment to patients suffering from obstructive hydrocephalus from unresectable tumours.

Neuronal activity alters local blood flow in brain tumour adjacent to the activating cortex.

Characteristics of blood flow in brain tumours have been studied extensively; these studies are important for diagnosis of malignancy and therapy monitoring. Our study is the first to consider how activity dependent changes of regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) alter tumour blood flow in the brain tumour adjacent to the activating cortex.

Such an interaction between cortical blood flow and tumour blood flow may be of value for evaluating mechanisms of neurological symptoms associated with brain tumours.

Neuronal activation causes an increase of regional cerebral blood flow (rCBF) in the activating cortical area. Near infrared spectroscopy (NIRS) demonstrates the increase in rCBF during neuronal activity as increases in oxygenated haemoglobin (oxy-Hb) and total haemoglobin (total-Hb) with a decrease in deoxyhaemoglobin (deoxy-Hb)\(^*\). NIRS is an optical method to measure concentration changes of oxy-Hb, deoxy-Hb, and total-Hb (oxy-Hb+deoxy-Hb) in cerebral vessels by means of the characteristic absorption spectra of haemoglobin in the near infrared range.

In the present study, we measured changes of oxygenation and haemodynamics in the brain tumour adjacent to the activating cortex by means of NIRS. We found transient decreases in oxy-Hb and total-Hb in the tumour during neuronal activation, suggesting that the local blood flow of the tumour was decreased by a transient increase of rCBF induced by neuronal activation.

The patient was a 35 year old right handed man who presented with complaints of headache and dizziness. A neurological examination showed no abnormalities and a decline in language functions. A postcontrast CT showed a well defined large enhancing tumour (4×5 cm) compressing the left frontal lobe. Computed tomographic angiography showed that the branches of the left middle cerebral artery supplied the tumour (figure A). The patient underwent a left frontal craniotomy for removal of the tumour; the pathological diagnosis was meningioma. The NIRS measurement was performed before the operation.

We measured haemodynamic changes in the brain tumour during neuronal activation in the left frontal lobe induced by cognitive stimulation.

**Table 1 Clinical characteristics of patients who underwent third ventriculostomy for obstructive hydrocephalus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Age (y), Sex</th>
<th>Diagnosis</th>
<th>Result*</th>
<th>Postoperative stay in hospital (days)</th>
<th>Survival time (weeks)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>70,M</td>
<td>Lung mixed adenocarcinoma and squamous cancer metastasis to thalamus</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>46,F</td>
<td>Ovarian adenocarcinoma metastases to cerebrum and medulla</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>38,F</td>
<td>Breast ductal carcinoma metastases to brainstem and cerebellum</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>75,M</td>
<td>Rectal adenocarcinoma metastasis to cerebellum</td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>39,F</td>
<td>Breast adenocarcinoma metastasis to cerebellum</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>60,M</td>
<td>Lung adenocarcinoma metastasis to thalamus</td>
<td>Failed</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6↑</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>64,M</td>
<td>Osteopagel carcinoma metastatic to cerebellum</td>
<td>Improved</td>
<td>7+</td>
<td>1↑</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Results are considered improved if the patient had resolution of symptoms and follow up imaging showed hydrocephalus improved or resolved.

†Patient is currently alive.
tasks. We monitored concentration changes of oxy-Hb, deoxy-Hb, and total-Hb, using an NIRO-500 instrument (Hamamatsu Photonics KK, Japan). The optodes were placed at an interoptode distance of 3.5 cm on the forehead so that the centre of the two optodes was placed on the centre of the tumour. With an interoptode distance of 4 cm, correlations of oxy-Hb and total-Hb measured by NIRS and rCBF measured by PET suggested that the reliable penetration depth of near infrared light into brain tissue is about 1.3 cm; thus the present NIRS measurement area was restricted in the tumour. The patient was seated and had his eyes open during the NIRS measurement. Informed consent was obtained from the Neurology patient.

To activate the left frontal lobe, we used the following four tasks: (1) semantic verbal fluency, which entails naming as many items in a semantic category (for example, animals) as possible; (2) confrontation naming, which involves naming ordinary items presented by the tester; (3) backward digit span, a working memory task which involves reporting of digits (2 to 8) in the reverse order; (4) reading, which entails reading a short descriptive passage aloud. The speech responses of the patient to the tasks were normal.

Figure B shows an example of changes in NIRS during the naming task. After the beginning of the task, oxy-Hb and total-Hb decreased to negative values during the task, and deoxy-Hb also decreased. These changes returned to the control level gradually after the end of the task. The other tasks also caused similar changes of oxy-Hb, total-Hb, and deoxy-Hb.

The rCBF in the left frontal lobe is generally increased by all the tasks used in the present study. Indeed, our NIRS activation study using the cognitive tasks showed increases in oxy-Hb and total-Hb in the left frontal lobe in most normal adults—for example, increases in oxy-Hb and total-Hb were found in 92.3% of young adult subjects (mean (SD) 28.8 (4.4) years) during the task, and deoxy-Hb also decreased. These changes returned to the control level gradually after the end of the task. The other tasks also caused similar changes of oxy-Hb, total-Hb, and deoxy-Hb.

The decrease in oxy-Hb and total-Hb recorded from the brain tumour indicates a decrease of local blood flow in the tumour because the NIRS measurement area was restricted to the brain tumour. The decreases in oxy-Hb and total-Hb were found only during the tasks; consequently, these changes were probably not due to changes in systemic blood pressure, which can alter tumour blood flow. Based on these assumptions, we suggest that the increase of rCBF in the left frontal lobe induced by the tasks stole the local blood flow of the brain tumour through the cortical branches, leading to the decrease of local blood flow in the tumour. Gryniewicz suggests that activity-dependent increase in rCBF can steal blood flow from the adjacent tissues including non-activating cortex. Recent NIRS activation studies have shown that cognitive tasks cause decreases in oxy-Hb and total-Hb in the left frontal lobe in some normal subjects; these decreases indicate a decrease in rCBF. Although the physiological mechanisms of the decrease in rCBF during neuronal activity have not yet been elucidated, we hypothesise that a stealing of blood flow is one of the mechanisms. The present report supports this hypothesis.

KAORU SAKATANI 
HUAUNCZOU YONG WANG 
Department of Neurosurgery, China-Japan Friendship Hospital, Beijing, China

WEMARALIGHTY 
Department of Rehabilitation, Takahashi Neurosurgical Hospital, Japan

Correspondence to: Dr Kaoru Sakatani, Department of Neurosurgery, China-Japan Friendship Hospital, Yinhua East Rd., Hepingli, Beijing 100029, People's Republic of China. Telephone (fax) 0086 10 64203246; email sakatani@public.east.cn


Migraine aura masquerading as Balint's syndrome

Migraine is a common neurological disorder with a prevalence of 0.5% to 2% in the general population. In one fourth of total migraineurs, headache is preceded by an aura.1 We describe a patient with recurrent episodes of migraine in whom headache was preceded by a constellation of visual symptoms. Her mother and two younger sisters who used to have six to eight episodes of headache per month also responded to either ergot drugs or sumatriptan, especially if taken at the onset of the episode. Occasionally these visual symptoms were not followed by headache. The patient would not lose contact with the environment during or after the visual symptoms. Her mother and two younger sisters were also having paroxysmal episodes of common migraine.

Her general physical and neurological examination in between the episodes was unremarkable. Neuropsychological examination during the aura symptoms disclosed that she was unable to see simultaneously all the objects in the visual field (simultagnosia). She did omit several words while reading a paragraph. However, she could comprehend and read each and every word individually. On being shown a complex picture comprising multiple subunits she was not able to comprehend and perceive the entire picture but able to perceive all of the parts of the picture individually (seeing in piecemeal). These aforementioned features were consistent with simultagnosia. Besides simultagnosia, she had optic ataxia as evidenced by her inability to coordinate hand-eye movements. Optic ataxia was tested as follows: each eye was tested separately and the hand ipsilateral to the eye being tested was used. The target stimulus was a 5 mm long pin with a white light at the end placed at preselected locations. The patient was asked to touch this pin with her index finger without shifting her gaze from the fixation point. The patient had difficulty in performing this test but had no problems in reaching out to her own body parts or an auditory stimulus with her eyes closed. These features were consistent with optic ataxia. Moreover, gaze apraxia was evident by her inability to look at an object on command. However, she could do it spontaneously. In addition, she had impaired smooth pursuit and voluntary saccades in all directions. Reflex eye movements were normal. Visual acuity during the episode was 6/6 bilaterally. Visual fields were normal during the episode as demonstrated by the confrontation method. Ophthalmological examination, including perimetry performed during a symptom free period, was unremarkable. There was no clinical evidence of Gerstmann syndrome, prosopagnosia, object agnosia, or colour agnosia. Her cranial CT and magnetic resonance angiography were unremarkable.

Electroencephalography was also non-contributory. The frequency of visual aura symptoms and headache decreased considerably after the patient was started on flunarizine at a daily dosage of 10 mg at bed time. The visual impulses, after being received by the primary visual cortex (Brodmann area 17), are interpreted and integrated in visual association areas 18 and 19. Brodmann area 19, in turn, is connected with the angular gyrus and frontal eye field that contain visual association fibres. Any lesion in the visual association areas or their connections would result in impaired integration of visual impulses despite normal visual acuity.

The visual symptom complex in this case possibly represents an aura of migraine. The pathogenesis of migraine aura has been a debatable issue.2 In this case it is suggested that the pathophysiological process of migraine aura results in a disconnection-syndrome by...
involving visual association areas and their association pathways. Optic ataxia, gaze apraxia, and simultagnosia seem to represent a dissociation of visual information from the frontal eye field and dorsal parietal regions.

PARVAIZ A SHAH
NAFEE
Department of Neurology, Government Medical College and Associated SMHS Hospital, Srinagar, Kashmir, J and K 190001, India
Correspondence to: Dr Parvaiz A Shah, Firdousa

Correspondence to: Dr Parvaiz A Shah, Firdousahemorrhage or mass effect was asymmetric, and showed no evidence of lesions were bilateral, widely distributed, consistent with residual cerebral atrophy.

Rabies is caused by an RNA virus, a member of the Rhhabdoviridae family, it infects mammals and can be transmitted to humans by contact, generally from an animal excreting the virus in the saliva. Rabies manifests as an acute encephalomyelitis, the development of which is almost invariably fatal. The distinction between rabies and postvaccination encephalitis is difficult and may be helped by antigen detection via a skin biopsy; however, this technique is not available in Vietnam. Paralytic rabies could not be excluded in this patient and hence steroids were not used initially. Steroids have been reported to increase mortality in experimental animals with rabies, and it has been suggested that they may abrogate the immune response to the postexposure vaccine, thus precipitating uncontrolled rabies.

There are three types of postexposure vaccine in use worldwide. The Semple type (STV) is obtained from inactivated virus prepared on adult animal nerve tissue; it is inexpensive and relatively easy to produce. In India 3 million people receive postexposure courses of STV (phenolised sheep brain) antirabies vaccine each year. These produce neurological reactions, including postvaccination encephalomyelitis, in up to 1 in 220 courses, with a 3% mortality. Clinical forms include a reversible mononeuritis multiplex, and meningoencephalitic and encephalomyelitic reactions. Myelin basic protein and related neural proteins from the nervous tissue of the animal on which the virus was cultivated stimulate an autoimmune reaction in the human nervous system.

Tolerance has been improved by the development of the suckling mouse brain vaccine (SMBV). The attenuated virus is cultured on immature mouse brain tissue, which contains little myelin, thus reducing the risk of complications. SMBV is inexpensive (US$1.5 per treatment course) and easily manufactured locally; it is the most widely used postvaccination vaccine in Vietnam. Rare neurological reactions do occur with SMBV. Complications of the CNS have been reported to occur after vaccination with an incidence of 1:2700 treated people, with a 22% mortality. The mortality was particularly high (90%) if there was extensive CNS involvement. The third type of vaccine available is the human diploid cell tissue culture vaccine (HDCV), which is both safe and efficacious. However, the recommended regimen is not affordable in most developing countries.

When we approached the Rabies Laboratory, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries, United Kingdom for advice in this case their comment was “why do you use the SMBV, can’t you use another vaccine”. Worldwide about 10 million people each year receive rabies vaccine after exposure; at the Centre for Tropical Diseases we treat 3000 people with dog bites annually. The cost of an HDCV in Vietnam, administered in its present regimen (1ml given for 5 days on days 0, 3, 7, 14, and 28 with an optional booster on day 90) is US$ 125, making the use of this vaccine unaffordable.

This is the first report to show the demyelinating CNS lesions on MRI, and their resolution after steroid therapy. It is relatively rare for patients to survive if they develop severe CNS effects after postexposure rabies vaccination. Although the incidence of reactions to SMBV is very much lower than STV, this report confirms that it does still occur. Both SMBV and STV are widely used throughout the developing world, and would be the vaccine administered to travellers exposed to animal bites in such countries. This case stresses the need for high dose steroids in postexposure vaccine encephalitis and the urgent need for the development and deployment of a safe, and critically, affordable postrabies exposure vaccine regimen.

The economic low dose multisite intradermal regimen using the HDCV provides an example of how this goal may be achieved although it is not yet widely accepted. Such a vaccine regimen (0.1 ml HDCV given at multisite injections on days 0, 7, 28, and 90) could be made affordable, and offers excellent protection without the risks of postexposure immune mediated mediators.

N V V CHAU
TT NHIEN
Centre for Tropical Diseases, 190 Ben Han Tu, District 5, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam
R SELLAR
Department of Clinical Neurosciences, Western General Hospital, Edinburgh, UK
R KNEEN
J FARRAR

Brain MRI in May 1997. (A) T2 weighted image showing multiple areas of high signal in the cerebral white matter. Bilateral subcortical and periventricular lesions are seen. (B) Brain MRI in July 1997, T2 weighted image shows resolution of the white matter lesions.
Leukoencephalopathy associated with khat misuse

The leaves of the tree Catha edulis, or khat (also qat and kat) are chewed by a large proportion of the adult population of the Yemen, and throughout Saharan and sub-Saharan Africa. The leaves are also chewed by members of the Yemeni and Somali community in the United Kingdom. 1 The psychoactive constituents of khat are cathin (d-norcocephedrine), cathine, and cathinone (an alkaloid with a structure resembling ephedrine and amphetamine) and users report a mild euphoria similar to that of amphetamine. 2 Khat is acknowledged as a precipitant of psychosis and has also been reported to cause cognitive impairment. 3 We report a case in which khat chewing has been associated with a severe and disabling neurological illness.

A 56 year old Somali living in the United Kingdom for the past 18 years was admitted to a psychiatric hospital with a 5 week history of progressive confusion and agitation. His family reported that he had been chewing khat, in their opinion to excess, every day during that time but had stopped 2 days before admission. There was one previous admission to hospital 9 months previously with khat induced psychosis, from which he recovered without complications within 24 hours. On this occasion, shortly after admission, his conscious level deteriorated abruptly and he was referred for neurological opinion. He was apyrexial and general medical examination was normal. He opened his eyes spontaneously but there was no verbal response and he did not obey commands. He withdrew all four limbs to pain. Upper and lower limbs were held in flexion with markedly increased tone. Reflexes were brisk but equal. The right plantar was extensor. There were bilateral palmar and grasp reflexes.

Full blood count, urea and electrolytes, glucose, liver function test, thyroid function test, viral serology, and malaria screen all gave normal results. Tests for HIV antibody, serum angiotensin converting enzyme, white cell enzymes, and serum and urinary porphyrias were negative. Erythrocyte sedimentation rate on admission was 58 mm/h.

Examination of the CSF showed normal opening pressure, protein 0.27 g/l, glucose 4.3 mmol/l (blood glucose 6.1 mmol/l), and no cells. His initial EEG was abnormal with diffuse slow waves indicative of widespread cerebral dysfunction. A chest radiograph and ultrasound examination of the abdomen were normal. Cranial MRI, although contaminated by movement artfact, showed diffuse abnormality in the deep cerebral white matter of both cerebral hemispheres. Fourteen days after admission he was witnessed to have a single brief adverse seizure with eye and head deviation to the right.

The patient was admitted to a rehabilitation unit. His mini mental state examination score and Barthel scores were zero. Feeding by percutaneous gastrostomy was started. A trial of intravenous methylprednisolone (1 g on 3 consecutive days) gave no benefit. Repeated EEGs (on four occasions) showed diffuse slow waves only. A second MRI (figure) 3 months after onset of symptom showed the presence of a continuing diffuse extensive abnormality in the deep white matter of both cerebral hemispheres with marked cortical atrophy. Brain biopsy (via front right craniotomy) was performed 3 months after the onset of his illness. There was no evidence of acute inflammation, vasculitis, or infarction.

While undergoing rehabilitation there has been slow improvement in his cognitive and locomotor function. After 1 year he is able to open and close his eyes, occasionally verbalise,localise pain, and obey simple commands. His plantars are flexor but he has persistent grasp and palmar reflexes. His nutrition is maintained by gastrostomy and he has an indwelling catheter.

The clinical presentation, EEG, and MRI findings suggest a rapidly progressive leukoencephalopathy. There are no previous reports of leukoencephalopathy in association with khat or amphetamine misuse; it has, however, been reported in association with other recreational drugs taken by mouth or inhalation. 4 An alternative for this man's presentation is a necrotising vasculitis, a well described complication of oral amphetamine misuse. 5 The clinical features, MRI appearance, brain biopsy, absence of haemorrhage, and lack of response to steroids make this unlikely.

The likely precipitant of this man's illness seems to be his use of khat. A drug screen on admission was negative, and his family denied misuse of other drugs. It remains possible that the sample of khat chewed by this man was contaminated. We are unaware of any previous reports of khat misuse with severe neurological deterioration; previous cases may not have been investigated or reported. In reporting this case our intention is to alert others to a possible complication of the misuse of this drug. Evidence of other cases would provide a powerful argument for the restriction of import and sale of khat.
M-protein, direct and indirect Coombs tests, cryoglobulin, antibodies to mycoplasma, myelin associated glycoprotein, gangliosides (GM1, GD1b, asialo-GM1, GT1b, GQ1b, Gal-C), P-ANCA, and C-ANCA. The CSF was normal. Titre of cold agglutinins was detectable at 1:256 at 4°C (normal <1:256). The patient's serum agglutinated adult group OI-red blood cells, but not OI-red blood cells or human cord red blood cells, signifying cold agglutinins with 1 specificity. Immunoelectrophoresis of the eluate confirmed IgM composition.

The initial nerve conduction study showed severe diminution or absence of compound motor nerve potentials (CMAPs) with mildly diminished conduction velocities. F wave latencies were mildly prolonged. There were no evoked sensory nerve action potentials (SNAPs) in median, ulnar, and sural nerves bilaterally. Electrophoretic studies of the affected muscles showed moderate neurogenic changes, but there were no fibrillation potentials except in the left anterior tibialis muscle. Sural nerve biopsy was performed. Epineurial vessels were surrounded by mononuclear cell infiltrates (figure A). Some vessels had focal necrosis of their wall. The small vessels in the endoneurium and epineurium showed sludging of red blood cells. The densities of large and small blood cells. The densities of large and small vessels were markedly decreased (diameter<5 µm: 1504/mm²). The densities of large and small myelinated fibres were markedly decreased (diameter>5 µm: 1704/mm², diameter >5 µm/708/mm², total: 2212/mm²)(figure B).

Teased fibre analysis showed that 90% of the fibres were undergoing axonal degeneration. Oral prednisolone (30–50 mg/day) for 4 weeks reduced the erythrocyte sedimentation rate and C reactive protein, but not the serum titre of cold agglutinins; neither was there any improvement of symptoms. He received massive dose intravenous corticosteroid therapy. This moderately improved the muscle strength and sensory disturbance. Follow up nerve conduction studies (71 days after the initial study) suggested conduction block of the right median nerve on the forearm (CMAP, duration at the wrist: 2.76 mV, 8.4 ms; CMAP, duration at the elbow: 1.87 mV, 8.8 ms), whereas CMAP could not be elicited in the initial study. We adapted the following criteria to define conduction block: <15% change in duration and >20% fall in negative peak amplitude between proximal and distal sites by percutaneous supramaximal stimulation of motor nerves. As the conduction block might delay smooth recovery of symptoms, Double filtration plasmapheresis was performed four times. After the second plasmapheresis, dysesthia and muscle strength improved remarkably. The titre of cold agglutinins was reduced to 1:64. The motor nerve conduction velocity (MCV) of the right median nerve was improved (pretreatment: 40.0 m/s, post-treatment: 57.0 m/s). Double filtration plasmapheresis showed demyelination in the peripheral nervous system. Taken together, neuropathy with cold agglutinins may involve immunologically mediated demyelination, microcirculation obstruction, and vasa nervorum vasculitis. The diversity of pathomechanisms may come from the difference target antigens recognised by cold agglutinins. Plasmapheresis proved effective in all cases. These findings strongly suggest that humoral factors including cold agglutinins may play an important part in the induction of neuropathy with cold agglutinins. We recommend plasmapheresis as first choice treatment for neuropathy associated with cold agglutinins.

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R OTSUKA FUTAMADAS K ARIMURA Y MARUYAMA Y ARIMURA M OSAME

The Third Department of Internal Medicine, Kagoshima University School of Medicine, Sakuragaoka 8–35–1 Kagoshima, Japan
Correspondence to: Dr R Otsuka, The Third Department of Internal Medicine, Kagoshima University School of Medicine, Sakuragaoka 8–35–1 Kagoshima, Japan


(A) Sural nerve (toluidine blue staining) showing epineural vessel surrounded by mononuclear cell infiltrates. Note fibrin deposition (arrows) and necrosis in media. (bar=20 µm). (B) Most of myelinated fibres are undergoing axonal degeneration. Many macrophages containing myelin debris infiltrate the endoneurium. (bar=50 µm).
The cholinergic hypothesis of Alzheimer’s disease: a review of progress

I read with interest the review of Francis et al regarding the progress of the cholinergic hypothesis of Alzheimer’s disease. They mentioned that donepezil produced improvement or no deterioration in more than 80% of patients, and that such responses should be viewed positively considering the progressive, degenerative nature of the disease. Various donepezil manufacturer’s medical representatives presenting data from a clinical study also commonly use this statement. However, this only partially reveals the truth.

In fact, the same study produced improvement or no deterioration in 59% patients on placebo. I think that the beneficial effect of donepezil in particular clinical trials should always be critically reviewed in comparison with placebo. In addition, as both 24 week placebo controlled donepezil trials performed so far excluded patients with behavioural disturbances, my impression is that the positive effect of donepezil on the symptoms of behavioural disturbances still remains controversial. In fact there are reports that donepezil might induce behavioural disturbances in patients with Alzheimer’s disease.

Therefore I would be extremely cautious about prescribing donepezil to patients with Alzheimer’s disease accompanied by behavioural disturbances.

Finally, donepezil was never investigated in a 36 week randomised double blind study as was mentioned in the review. The authors are probably referring to the randomised 24 week double blind placebo controlled trial with an additional 6 week single blinded placebo phase.

T BABIC
Department of Neurology, Medical School University of Zagreb, Kitarovic 12, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia.
Telephone 00385 1 217280, fax 00385 1 217280, email tomasbabic@rgz.hr

The authors reply:
We thank Professor Babic for the letter, which raises several interesting points. We agree that it may be more helpful to put the results attributed to treatment with donepezil in the context of the placebo response. In general, looking at this as a class effect in relation to several compounds, the picture emerging is that about twice as many people obtain a response to active treatment as to that with placebo. The high placebo response is a common factor in most studies in this field and is worthy of some explanation in its own right. Although it seems that these studies compare drug treatment with that of a placebo (one treatment against no treatment), the reality is that it is a comparison of patients receiving two treatments against other patients who are receiving one form of treatment. The additional treatment regime is, of course, the care and attention that they receive by being part of the clinical study, which often seems to have an impact, not just on the patient but also on their main carer or carers.

As far as behavioural disturbances are concerned, however, our review was making the point that evidence from ongoing from clinical trials to suggest that cholinomimetics drugs as a whole may have a beneficial effect on some non-cognitive behavioural symptoms. This has now been reported for at least two cholinesterase inhibitors, and two muscarinic agonists. In particular, a clear link is emerging between psychotic symptoms and cholinergic dysfunction. Thus, Bodick et al have shown that the M/M, agonist xanomeline causes a dose dependent reduction in hallucinations, agitation, and delusions in a 6 month randomised double blind placebo controlled, parallel group trial. In addition, Cummings and Kaiser have shown that the cholinesterase inhibitor tacomine is effective in reducing psychotic features than cognitive disturbances; tacrine also reduces or abolishes hallucinations in Parkinson’s disease. Another cholinesterase inhibitor, metrifonate, was also shown to reduce the number of hallucinations in a 26 week randomised, double blind, placebo controlled safety and efficacy study in patients with Alzheimer’s disease. Further support for a link between acetylcholine and psychosis derives from postmortem data showing that the activity of choline acetyltransferase in the temporal cortex of patients with Lewy body dementia was lower in those patients than in hallucinators than in patients without this feature. Finally, in animals the partial M/M, agonist (SR666-(3-propylhydro-1,2,5-thiadiazol-4-yl)-1-azabicyclo[3.2.1]octane) has produced a preclinical profile suggestive of antipsychotic efficacy that the psychomimetic NMDA receptor antagonist ketamine (when administered at subanaesthetic doses) reduced brain concentrations of acetylcholine. Thus, on the basis of both clinical and preclinical data, a clear rationale is emerging for prescribing cholinomimetic agents for treating the non-cognitive behavioural symptoms associated with dementia, particularly psychosis.

Professor Babic is also correct in identifying two of the studies referred to as the 30 week randomised multicentre placebo controlled parallel group studies, which included a 24 week double blind treated phase.

We are grateful to your correspondent for providing us with the opportunity to clarify these points.

The authors:
Prof. Dr. Paul T. Francis
Neuroscience Research Centre, GKT School of Biomedical Science, King’s College London, London SE1 9RT, UK

Prof. Dr. Alan M. Palmer
Department of Clinical Pharmacology, Royal Free Hospital, London, London NW3 2QG, UK

Prof. Dr. Michael Snape
Cerebrus Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Worthing, Wiltshire, RG41 5SU, UK

Prof. Dr. Gordon W. Wilcock
Department of Care of the Elderly, Frimley Hospital, Surrey, GU16 7EY, UK

BOOK REVIEWS


The neuropathies of diabetes are common (as the chapters in this book repeatedly remind us) and can be very degenerative. Symptomless neuropathy underlies foot ulceration and sepsis as the commonest clinical consequence of diabetic neuropathy but other neuropathies—unpleasant disorders range from exceptionally severe pain to the whole range of problems resulting from autonomic failure. This book comprehensively covers nearly every aspect of the subject, systematically (and at times exhaustively) from its epidemiology and pathology (exhaustingly) to structural, functional, and clinical problems and their treatment. Most of the authors are well known in the field and their accounts are up to date and authoritative.

Unfortunately, struggle as they might, all authorities have difficulty in defining what they mean by diabetic neuropathy. In this regard, understanding of this complication both in clinical and pathological terms, as well as with regard to treatment, lags far behind that of the other classic diabetic complications, nephropathy and retinopathy. Even its classification presents problems and attempts to do so are found in four different chapters, describing four classifications. Repitition is an unfortunate feature of this book and—quite apart from the confusion over classification—aspects of pathogenesis, structural changes, epidemiology, diagrams, and some reference to treatment (for example, that of pain) appear repeatedly in different chapters in greater or lesser detail.
This is certainly a book for the specialist and not at all (as the preface suggests) for the family practitioner. There are good reviews of nerve structure, causation, and treatment of painful neuropathies and focal neuropathies. The comprehensive survey of the Diabetes Control and Complications Trial (DCCT) shows in detail the only treatment which is truly effective (diabetic control); and the lengthy description of aldose reductase inhibitor trials establishes that, even after more than two decades of investigation, further trials are still needed.

Clinical evaluation of somatic and autonomic neuropathies are useful and also, to some extent, comprehensive but lack specificity—that is, normal values for simple tests are difficult to find. The huge subject of the diabetic foot is covered in these chapters and “the impact of micro and macrovascular disease” is compressed into the last nine pages of the book.

The bibliography is important and often very up to date with references ranging from 33 to 283 per chapter. If this book is at times confusing, this reflects the confusion regarding the nature and treatment of the diabetic neuropathies as much as the overlap and repetition found in its different chapters. It is a book of reference for the specialist who will be well served by the comprehensiveness of some of its reviews and their assembly of the appropriate literature.

PETER WATKINS


The quest for a means of accurate localisation of structures during neurosurgery has taxed the minds of clinicians from early in the history of the specialty, starting with Zernov’s enccephalograph more than a century ago. Just as the solution to the mariners’ problem of determining longitude from which it partly takes its name, neuronavigation (“the surgeon’s sextant”) has relied on the advent of new technologies to provide solutions to an age old puzzle.

Advances In Neuronavigation begins by tracing the history of stereotaxis from a Cartesian coordinate system devised by Clarke and Horsley at the beginning of this century, through ventriculography, stereotactic brain atlases, and CT/MR frame based stereotaxis. The final part of the first section discusses the roots of image guided frameless stereotaxis through the integration of high speed graph- ics computers, informatics, biotechnology, and robotics.

The remainder of the text is divided into four sections. The first concerns the creation of maps from CT, MRI, MRA, PET, and various types of functional imaging. The following section discusses clinical applications of stereotaxis, beginning with different authors’ experiences of their own favoured frames, the biopsy of difficult lesions such as those in the brainstem or posterior fossa, and finally experience with different image guidance systems, and their integration with the operating microscope and endoscope. There then follows a series of chapters devoted to radiosurgery, and to image guidance in epilepsy and functional surgery. The final section is entitled Frontiers In Neurosurgical Navigation and considers, among other topics, intraoperative MRI, telepresence in neurosurgery, and robotics.

The incorporation of new technology is likely to alter surgical practice radically over the coming decade and equipment that seemed at the cutting edge of technology only a few years ago, such as the mechanical arm, has already passed into near obsolescence at a bewildering rate. This volume provides an excellent account of the developments which have occurred in neuronavigation, and a thought provoking insight into the wider applications of equipment of which many of us use only a fraction of the potential capability. The title of the book should perhaps have included the word cranial, as there is almost no discussion of the impact that this technology has had in surgery of the spine. This aside it is an excellent book although, like the technology it chronicles, one which is likely to date quite rapidly.

ROBERT MACFARLANE


The title and back cover of the latest addition to Neurology Lite texts contains the usual proclamations. “Concise, key topics, revision aid, essential, review”... the well trailed soundbites demanded by the consumer in the increasingly competitive market of “read less - learn more” books. This book, however, is unusual and distinct. Unlike many rivals it is not an A5 facsimile of a superior parent A3 reference tome. Brevity, so essential to the success of an overview work, has sacrificed neither clarity nor clinical relevance. The strength of Key Topics in Neurology owes much to the author’s ability to negotiate skillfully the compromises necessary for a successful distillation of a large and complex field. He has not shied from wholesale culling of neurological ballast. The allied ability to distinguish and highlight the salient and relevant from the obscure and historical allows this small book to be surprisingly thorough in its coverage and topicality. There is sufficient up to date information on most areas of neurology such that this book would be useful for specialist registrars albeit without the detail or embellishment they seek. In terms of the aims of this book such observations must be regarded as complimentary.

My limited criticisms relate to details of layout and presentation. I found the exclusive alphabetical arrangement of chapters mildly disorientating in that, for example, History taking in Neurology is to be found at p 151. Similarly, the absence of diagrams and tables is an unexpected omission as I would imagine that this would have complemented the overall style of the book. These are minor gripes of what in print largely matches the sleeve hype and with a price tag of just £27-50 the book will be welcomed by undergraduates through to specialist registrars.

SIDDHARTHAN CHANDRAN

Readers may be interested in:


K Sudo, N Fujiki, S Tsuji, M Aikii, T Higashi, M Ninno, S Kikuchi, F Moriwaka, K Tashiro.

Focal (segmental) dyshidrosis in syringomyelia. J Neurol Neurosurg Psychiatry 1999;67:106-8. During the editorial process the footnote to table 1(p 107) was wrongly transcribed.The last line—¶p value for each pair of items: hyperhidrosis v normohydrosis 0.0007; hypohydrosis v normohydrosis 0.7282; normohydrosis v hypohydrosis 0.0012 should read—¶p value for each pair of items: hyperhidrosis v hyperhidrosis 0.0007; hypohydrosis v hypohydrosis 0.0012; normohydrosis v hypohydrosis 0.7282; normohydrosis v normohydrosis 0.0012.