Right ipsilateral hypersensation in a case of anosognosia for hemiplegia and personal neglect with the patient's subjective experience

Recently, there have been some reports regarding hyperkinetic motor behaviours contralateral to hemiplegia in acute stroke.1,3 These behaviours are probably the reflection of early plastic changes of brain maps and circuits after an acute lesion and an active process induced by disinhibition to establish new compensatory pathways.1 I encountered a peculiar case of a patient with right ipsilateral “hypersensation” after a right hemispheric infarction in the acute period who also presented severe left sensorimotor disturbance, hyperkinetic motor behaviours in the right upper limb, anosognosia for hemiplegia, and personal neglect. It was possible to record the patient’s subjective experience of the acute phase, which was helpful for understanding the mechanism of anosognosia.

A 76 year old right handed woman was admitted to hospital soon after the onset of left hemiparesis and hemisensory disturbance. She had undergone implantation of a cardiac pacemaker because of sick sinus syndrome. On neurological examination, she was awake and orientated to time and place, but showed inattention and motor impersistence. There was no aphasia or apraxia, but mild left hemispatial neglect was detected. Left hemiparesis was noticed (upper limb 0/5, lower limb 2/5, and face 3/5). Sensory loss was complete in all modalities in the upper limb and severe in the face and lower limb, being slightly preserved for pain and coldness. She denied the existence of left hemiparesis and had completely lost the sensation of ownership of her left hemibody. When I asked her the owner of her left hand and leg while showing them to her, she remarked that these belonged to her grandmother. Brain CT (figure) showed a fresh infarction in the right precentral and post-central gyrus, extensively extending to the right medial aspect of the frontal lobe (supplementary motor area).

From the second hospital day she complained that she felt very cold in the right half of her body and even sometimes felt pain because the wind from the air conditioner was too strong. I told her that the air conditioning system worked but it was not set at a low temperature because it was winter. She understood my explanation but she continued to complain of spontaneous, abnormal sensation in her right hemibody. The sensation was most severe in the upper limb followed by the face and lower limb, whereas it was not triggered or worsened by any sensory stimulation, and objective sensory deficits were not present in the right hemibody. She usually wrapped herself tightly in a blanket to avoid coldness. She did not complain of any other delusional or illusory feelings. There were also hyperkinetic movements in the right upper limb such as patting the head with the right arm, manipulations of sheets and blanket, and rhythmic finger movements. The result of a mini mental state examination performed on the fourth hospital day was 25/30.

The abnormal sensation persisted for almost 1 month and gradually subsided, whereas the left hemiparesis and sensory disturbance improved. Touch, pain, and temperature were intact in the face and lower limb, but there was no improvement in position and vibration in the entire left hemibody. In the meantime, she began to recognise the left hemiparesis and regained the sensation of ownership of her left hemibody. The following are her recollections from the time of onset on the 60th hospital day.

“One morning, I woke up and found that there was a strange hand and foot close to the left side of my body, as though my dead grandmother lay aside me. I tried to throw them off but they were too heavy to move. I glanced at them and felt that they looked flabby and all wrinkled, so I was convinced that they belonged to my grandmother. I had no idea that the left side of my body was disabled or even ill.

After hospitalisation, I felt very cold in the right half of my body and sometimes felt pain because of the powerful wind from the air conditioner. I understood that the hospital did not use cold air conditioning in winter, but that powerful, cold wind could not have come from anything other than an air conditioner. Anyway, this unpleasant feeling gradually subsided, and at the same time, I realised that the disabled left side of my body belonged to me and that I had suffered a brain disorder.”

Ghika et al. described 20 patients with hyperkinetic motor behaviours contralateral to hemiplegia in acute stroke who were found only with large infarcts in the territory of the internal carotid artery, middle cerebral artery, or the anterior cerebral artery and which correlated significantly with the severity of motor deficit and the presence of aphasia, neglect, or sensory loss. These characteristics are similar to those in the present patient. However, “hypersensation” as found in this case was not described. Regarding the mechanism of these behaviours, Ghika et al. speculated that they represent the clinical expression of early plastic changes of brain maps and circuits after an acute lesion and probably an active process induced by disinhibition to establish new compensatory pathways.3 Such ipsilateral symptoms might occur not only in the motor system, but in the sensory system as well. In the present patient, the degree of right hypersensation...
was parallel with the degree of the disturbance of sensory deficits of the homologous left side, and hypersensations subsided as the sensory disturbance of the left side improved. This suggests that the disinhibition or hyperexcitability to facilitate functional reorganisation may have been the main cause of hyperesthesia.

Lesional extent must also be considered. Studies in animals and patients with stroke with sensorimotor cortical lesion provided several insights into the basis for recovery. In the cortical region, there are three areas where increased activation has been suggested: the sensorimotor cortex of the unaffected hemisphere, the supplementary motor area (probably bilateral, ipsilateral much greater than contralateral to the lesion), and peri-infarct lesion of affected hemisphere.14 In the present case, the right supplementary motor area belonged to the lesion and the right sensorimotor cortex was extensively involved. Acute onset of severe motor and sensory disturbance caused rapid disinhibition and increased activation which had to depend exclusively on the (unaffected) sensorimotor cortex as the right supplementary motor area and right peri-infarct area could not be involved in the reorganisation process. I speculate that this provoked hyperkinetic motor behaviour as well as hypersensations in the right hemibody.

In the case of patients who recovered, there have been few reports of subjective perceptions in the acute stage of stroke.15 Grotta et al reported the subjective experiences of 24 patients with nonlacunar ischaemic stroke who dramatically recovered. They speculated: the sensorimotor cortex of the unaffected hemisphere, the supplementary motor area involved. Acute onset of severe motor and sensory disturbance caused rapid disinhibition and increased activation which had to depend exclusively on the (unaffected) sensorimotor cortex as the right supplementary motor area and right peri-infarct area could not be involved in the reorganisation process. I speculate that this provoked hyperkinetic motor behaviour as well as hypersensations in the right hemibody.

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Phantom limb sensations after complete thoracic transverse myelitis

Phantom phenomena are common complications of limb amputations and may occasionally follow traumatic paraplegia and severe injuries of peripheral nerves. However, they have not been previously reported in patients without traumatic paraplegia. The following case history describes a patient with transverse myelitis resulting in complete paraplegia who experienced persistent movements and abnormal positions of her paralysed lower limbs. These findings suggest that disruption of the anatomical and functional integrity of the spinal cord may be the most important factor in the pathogenesis of phantom sensations.

A 61 year old woman presented with severe weakness of both legs, skin sensory loss and paraesthesia of the lower limbs, and bowel and bladder symptoms. She was well until 3 months earlier when she started to develop a tingling sensation and numbness over the outer side of her left leg. These symptoms gradually progressed and by the time she was admitted to hospital she had numbness and the sensory impairment of the whole of the left leg and in the distal half of the right leg. A month before admission she had become unsteady on her feet and developed urinary urgency, urge incontinence, and constipation. There was also a rapidly progressive weakness of both legs, but no other symptoms.

Four years earlier the patient had had paraplegia in both feet. This was thought to be due to peripheral neuropathy, but the diagnosis was not confirmed with neurophysiological tests. The symptoms resolved in a few weeks. The patient had a partial thyrdoicectomy for a nodular goitre 15 years ago. There was no other medical or family history of note. She was not taking any medication.

Physical examination confirmed the presence of complete flaccid paraplegia with skin sensory loss of all sensory modalities to the waist. The knee and ankle jerks were absent and both plantar responses were extensor. She had retention of urine and symptoms, signs, and radiological features of a paralytic ileus. The rectal examination and general physical examination was unremarkable. A full blood count, urea and electrolytes, and liver and thyroid function tests were within normal limits. An MRI of the cervical spine confirmed the presence of mild degenerative changes in the cervical spine at the level of C5-C7. There was no radiological evidence of an intrinsic or extrinsic cord compression or demyelination. However, the five distal segments of the thoracic cord appeared swollen and there was loss of the normal CSF rim ventral and dorsal to the cord on T1 weighted images. The T2 signal was prolonged and there was no contrast enhancement of the cord. The occurrence of phantom sensations associated with the phantom phenomena is not fully understood at present. It has been suggested that they may be a manifestation of a psychological disorder or due to organic neuropsychological abnormalities.

Psychological factors such as denial or grief for the lost body part have been suggested as the cause of the postamputation phantom phenomena. However, this explanation is not supported by the present observation. For example, the occurrence of phantom phenomena does not correlate with poor psychological adjustment or with the incidence of depression in patients.6 Another hypothesis is that damaged peripheral somatosensory receptors fire spontaneously and give rise to the painful or abnormal experience. However, phantom sensations have been reported by patients after spinal anaesthesia in the absence of damage to the peripheral nervous system. At present the neuroumata theory8 offers the most plausible explanation for phantom sensations and pain.

According to this theory the symptoms associated with the phantom phenomena originate from genetically predetermined sensory images (or sensory engrams) that are stored in the cerebral cortex. It was postulated that the sensory images are triggered when neural impulses from the periphery are blocked. The patient reported here had complete “functional” transection of the spinal cord. The occurrence of phantom phenomena in this patient was therefore independent of the neural input from the peripheral nervous system. This case provides further evidence that phantom phenomena are due to a central neurophysiological mechanism, probably related to the presence of residual representations of the body image. This can explain why phantom sensations have been reported after amputation, burn, or burn patients.
triggered by impulses arising spontaneously from damaged spinal cord neurons. This is in accord with a previous report of structural and functional changes in the spinal cord in the acute stage after deafferentation.7

Ramachandran and Hirstein2 reviewed the studies of the topographical reorganisation of the cerebral cortex after limb amputations and concluded that the mechanism of phantom experiences is “remapping” of specific brain areas. The present study did not consider this question. However, the diversity of the illusionary experiences of movement reported by our patient suggests a more diffuse cortical reorganisation. This is more in keeping with the neuromatrix theory and the presence of “dissuse neural matrix”.10

The occurrence of phantom limb phenomena in patients with non-traumatic CNS lesions had also been previously described in a few patients with stroke. Halligan et al11 carried out a detailed study of a 65 year old man with severe left sided weakness, sensory loss, and hemianopia who, for several weeks, consistently reported a phantom (or supernumerary) third limb. Like our patient, he had good insight into his neurological deficits and his behaviour was completely rational, suggesting that the phantom experience was not a delusional belief but a direct result of organic brain damage.

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Vestibular evoked myogenic potentials in multiple sclerosis

Myogenic potentials generated by a click evoked vestibulospinal reflex can be easily recorded from the tonically contracting ipsilateral sternocleidomastoid muscle (SCM). These “vestibular evoked myogenic potentials” (VEMPs) are abolished by selective vestibular nerve section as well as by cer-
on both sides involving the vestibulospinal tracts bilaterally (figure C). Patients 2 and 3 also had high intensity areas in the same areas. Apart from lesions in this area, all showed high signal intensity areas in the cerebral white matter. This preliminary study shows that latencies of a vestibulospinal reflex can be prolonged in multiple sclerosis. As in these three patients the VEMPs were remarkably delayed rather than simply abolished as occurs in patients with perinuclear vestibular lesions, the VEMP delay could be attributed to demyelination either of primary afferent axons at the root entry zone or secondary vestibulospinal tract axons rather than to lesions involving vestibular nucleus neurons. The MRI findings in these patients were not inconsistent with this proposition. Measurement of VEMPs could be a useful clinical test to evaluate function of the vestibulospinal pathway and for detecting subclinical vestibulospinal lesions in suspected multiple sclerosis.

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Sensory ataxia as the initial clinical symptom in X-linked recessive bulbospinal neuromopathy

X-Linked recessive bulbospinal neuropa- athy (X-BSNP) has previously been described as a disease in which the first clinical symptoms which occur concern the motor system. A weakness of the shoulder and pelvic girdle muscles as well as cramps and muscle pain in the proximal limbs are normally found in the early stages. The onset of X-BSNP generally ranges between the ages of 25 and 50 years; the disorder then shows a slow but continuous progression of symptoms. An involvement of facial and bulbar musculature with fasciculations and atrophy of these muscles and, therefore, often dysarthria and dysphagia, are common symptoms of an advanced stage. Nevertheless, life expectancy does not seem to be consider- ably reduced with X-BSNP. Brain involvement was reported to be minimal or non-existent. Pathoanatomical studies showed that a degeneration of both the lower motor and primary sensory neurons represent the under- lying pathologic process for the clinical symptoms. The pathogenetic link between the abnormally expanded CAG trinucleotide repeat in the first exon of the androgen receptor gene which is found in affected patients and the anterior horn cells and the primary sensory neurons with consequent axonal degeneration of the dorsal root fibres has not been established yet. Although central and peripheral sen- sory conduction has been shown to be highly abnormal with absent or markedly prolonged sensory action potentials, most of the time the clinical findings of only a little sensory impairment do not correspond well to this electrophysiological constellation. We re- port sensory ataxia as the initial clinical symptom in a patient with X-BSNP. A 63 year old retired journalist felt like “walking on pillows” for the first time when he was 45 years old. He had the subsequent years the distally accentuated and symmetric loss of sensibility for touch, temperature, pain, position, and vibration was progressive in the legs—and later—also in the arms. At the age of 48 he noticed fasciculations of the facial muscles and a slow development of a painless, bilateral weakness of the proximal muscles of the lower and upper limbs. No related disease was found in his father’s family; nothing is known about the maternal side of his family history.

The clinical examination of the patient showed a severe sensory gait ataxia as well as a dyspraxia of his hands. Other symptoms were a tremor of the hands and occasional spasms of the oral and pharyngeal musculature. The functions of other cranial nerves were normal. Spontaneous fasciculations of the buccal mus- cles and less often of the proximal and distal limb musculature were accentuated. Deep tendon reflexes could generally not be detected and there were no pathological reflexes. A proximal accentuated weakness and amyotrophy of the legs and arms was found as well as a distally accentuated hypoaesthesia for all qualities was found. There were no cognitive deficits, cerebellar ataxia, or gynaecomastia. Laboratory results were not abnormal (including plasma testosterone, follicle stimulating hormone, luteinising hormone, and glucose tolerance) except for a raised creatine kinase (354 U/l). The CSF examination also showed no abnormalities. Motor nerve conduction velocities were within normal limits, whereas sensory action potentials were absent. Electromyography showed the typical features of chronic denervation in the proximal muscles of the lower and upper limbs as well as in the oral and pharyngeal muscles. Motor evoked poten- tials showed normal central conduction times but partially prolonged latencies with stimu- lation of the cervical and lumbar roots. With tibial and median nerve stimulation no somato- sensory evoked potentials were found neither at the cervical or lumbar nor at the cortical recording sites. Brain MRI was normal. The genetic analysis showed 42 CAG trinucleotide repeat in the androgen receptor gene (normal length 11–34 repeats), which is a valuable criterion in the diagnosis of X-BSNP. The example of our patient shows that the electrophysiological findings of the sensory system may correspond well to the clinical syndrome in X-BSNP. It is not clear why patients with X-BSNP in most cases do not show significant sensory impairment although substantial loss of the primary sensory neuron has been proved. We hope that findings in this case report may be an incentive for us to work for a better understanding of the problem as to why a specific neuronal degeneration can lead to a less specific pattern of clinical symptoms.

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Neuroleptic malignant syndrome without fever: a report of three cases

Although fever is considered to be a cardinal feature of neuroleptic malignant syndrome, we report on three patients who were afibrile but had all the other features of the neuroleptic malignant syndrome. This paper high- lights the need to suspect neuroleptic malig- nant syndrome and immediately initiate investiga- tion and appropriate management in any patient who develops rigidity and clouding of consciousness while receiving antipsychotic medication, thus averting potentially lethal sequelae such as respiratory depression, cardiac arrhythmia, autonomic dysfunction, and muscular rigidity on exposure to neuroleptic (and probably other psychotropic) medications.2 3

According to the DSM IV criteria, ‘promi- nence has been given to signs of increase in temperature (>39°C) and muscular rigidity. These must be accompanied by two or more of: diaphoresis, dysphagia, tremor, inconti- nence, altered consciousness, tachycardia, blood pressure changes, leucocytosis, temperature (>39°C) and muscular rigidity. These must be accompanied by two or more of: diaphoresis, dysphagia, tremor, inconti- nence, altered consciousness, tachycardia, blood pressure changes, leucocytosis and raised creatine kinase concentrations. Some researchers have also advocated that a pyrexia in excess of 38°C or 39°C is necessary for the diagnosis of X-BSNP. However, on reviewing the literature since 1965, we find no previous case reports highly suggestive of X-BSNP occurring without fever.1 2 We report three patients who had all the major features of NMS but were afibrile during the entire course of their illness. These case reports were within a 1 year period from July 1998 to July 1999.

A 52 year old man who was on treatment for postpsychotic depression presented after an act of deliberate self poisoning with a


A 20 year old man was started on 10 mg trifluoperazine twice a day for schizoaffective disorder with catatonic features and discharged after being given a depot injection of 40 mg fluphenazine intramuscularly. Fiv days later he was readmitted due to progressively increasing stiffness of his body, difficulty in swallowing, drowsiness, and incontinence of urine. On examination he was very rigid and somnolent. By the 5th day of admission he showed marked improvement with the autonomic disturbances disappearing and the rigidity subsiding. His creatine phosphokinase concentration became normal after 5 days of treatment.

A 22 year old man was admitted with increasing stiffness of his body, drowsiness, and urinary incontinence. He was rigid, had a tachycardia (pulse rate 130 beats per minute), a blood pressure of 210/105 mmHg, and his blood pressure showed wide fluctuations. On admission he was semiconscious, but opened his eyes to deep nystagmus. His heart rate was 120 beats per minute and was irregular. His blood pressure showed wide fluctuations and there was urinary incontinence. He then became confused and went into a state of semiconsciousness. There was no increase in body temperature. The creatine phosphokinase concentration was 1575 IU on the 2nd day and 6771 IU on the 4th day of his illness, and the white cell count was 17 000/mm³ (neutrophils 30%, lymphocytes 30%, monocytes 6%, and eosinophils 6%, and basophils 4%). As the patient did not have any increase in body temperature there was doubt as to the diagnosis. In standard medical texts fever was recorded as a necessary finding in NMS. However, a medline search contained reports of three patients with NMS in the absence of fever. The patient was immediately started on bromocriptine at a dose of 2.5 mg three times a day. On the 4th day of treatment his condition improved with the autonomic disturbances disappearing and the rigidity subsiding. His creatine phosphokinase concentration became normal after 5 days of treatment.

An 18 year old boy with schizophrenia was on long term antipsychotic drugs. He was admitted with increasing stiffness of his body, drowsiness, and urinary incontinence. On examination he was rigid, had a tachycardia (pulse rate 130 beats per minute), a blood pressure of 210/105 mmHg, and his blood pressure showed wide fluctuations. There was no increase in body temperature at admission or during the course of his illness. The creatine phosphokinase concentration was 1450 IU/L on the 2nd day of his illness and the white cell count was 15 000/mm³ (neutrophils 85%). Antipsychotic medication was stopped and he was started on 2.5 mg bromocriptine three times a day. He made a complete recovery, with the autonomic disturbances and rigidity subsiding within 5 days of treatment. One week later his creatine phosphokinase was 100 IU/L.

The neuroleptic malignant syndrome usually occurs with the use of therapeutic doses of neuroleptic drugs and commonly develops during the initial phases of treatment, when the drug dose is being stepped up, or when a second drug is introduced. However, it can occur at any time during long term neuroleptic treatment with factors such as exhaustion, agitation, and dehydrating acting as triggers. The above point is noteworthy especially given the possibility of the occurrence of a variant and uncommon clinical picture such as that described in our paper. There are no specific laboratory findings, but leucocytosis and raised creatine phosphokinase concentrations lend weight to the diagnosis.

These three cases illustrate the point that NMS can occur without fever. Our patients had all the features of NMS apart from fever and the response to bromocriptine can be taken as strong evidence that the diagnosis was accurate. Being familiar with this fact and other differential diagnoses, this syndrome can present plus a high degree of suspicion are important in making an early and accurate diagnosis of NMS. In fact, the appearance of muscle rigidity and clouding of consciousness in any patient receiving antipsychotic medication should prompt clinicians to suspect NMS and immediately initiate appropriate investigation and management. A failure to do so may lead to delay or failure to withdraw neuroleptic medication, and thus lead to potentially irreversible sequelae and even death. The first case also illustrates that at times of doubt about the diagnosis of an uncommon neurovegetative illness, reference to the literature including an immediate Medline search can help in making decisions about appropriate patient management.

A 35 year old man had had intractable left frontotemporal epileptic seizures since the age of 10 years. He is right handed and left language dominant. By the age of 25 years he was almost free of seizures under treatment with carbamazepine and phenobarbital. After that the number of seizures gradually increased and secondary generalised seizures appeared. Phenytoin, carbamazepine, valproic acid, phenobarbital, vigabatrin, lamotrigine, and clonazepam were used in different combinations without an acceptable seizure control. Repeated EEG recordings during the past few years were abnormal with prominent slow activity, long intervals of voltage attenuation, and common bursts of high voltage spike wave complexes recorded mainly at the left frontotemporal area. A high resolution MRI was normal.

In October 1997, a vagus nerve stimulator was implanted because of poor seizure control. During a 12 week baseline preceding the implantation, most of the seizures were focal and one to two secondary generalised seizures every 4 weeks were noted. The patient also experienced bursts of uncounted short lasting complex partial seizures on a few days every month. At the time of implantation medical treatment consisted of 500 mg topiramate and 475 mg lamotrigine daily. The patient had been on this daily dose for 6 months before implantation.

The stimulator output was progressively increased over 1 month from implantation. The final parameters were: pulse rate 30 Hz, 5 minutes on, 30 seconds off, 1.5 mA intensity, and 500 ms pulse width. During the subsequent 2 months the output was further increased to 30 Hz, 20 minutes on, 60 seconds off, 3 mA intensity, and 100 ms pulse width. During the subsequent 2 months the output was further increased to 30 Hz, 20 minutes on, 60 seconds off, 3 mA intensity, and 100 ms pulse width. During the subsequent 2 months the output was further increased to 30 Hz, 20 minutes on, 60 seconds off, 3 mA intensity, and 100 ms pulse width. During the subsequent 2 months the output was further increased to 30 Hz, 20 minutes on, 60 seconds off, 3 mA intensity, and 100 ms pulse width.
An EEG recording showed a low voltage normal background activity coexisting with low voltage fast rhythms without any paroxysmal activity.

The patient was admitted to hospital and antipsychotic medication with 15 mg/day haloperidol was added to his antiepileptic drug treatment. Biperiden (4 mg/day) was added to reduce extrapyramidal side effects. After 4 weeks of treatment the patient’s symptomatology was reduced to a degree of 50% from the initiation of the treatment and the patient left the hospital. In the follow up, the haloperidol dose was reduced gradually within 4 months to a dose of 5 mg/day (maintenance therapy).

The psychiatric symptom in our patient was not an ictal symptom because it occurred in a state of clear consciousness with a normal EEG in a period that was seizure free.

Regarding the involvement of drugs as a causative factor for psychosis, all established antiepileptic drugs have been shown to precipitate psychiatric symptoms. Treatment of the patient consisted of lamotrigine and topiramate, drugs that have been implicated in the provocation of psychiatric symptoms and as he had been already under the same medication for the past 10 months before the vagus nerve stimulator was implanted, the precipitation of psychosis does not seem to be pharmacologically possible. Further support for the above hypothesis is provided by the fact that the psychotic symptoms appeared just when seizure control was achieved by vagus nerve stimulation.

The comorbidity of psychosis and epilepsy in our patient could not be excluded. However, the absence of a history of psychosis as well as the lack of a positive family history for any major psychiatric disorder does not render support to the above possibilities. The reduction of seizure frequency and EEG normalisation as a cause of psychotic-like reactions in epileptic patients have been proposed by many authors. In our patient seizure cessation had a temporal sequence with development of psychosis and EEG normalisation.

The term “forced or paradoxical normalisation” is more or less a theoretical concept with unknown biochemical mechanisms. Neurotransmitter hypotheses, kindling the effect of recurrent seizures on the limbic system that facilitate the psychosis have been proposed as the possible underlying mechanism.

Our case may differentiate the proposals for the underlying mechanism of psychosis and EEG normalisation in epileptic patients. We suggest that seizure cessation in an epileptic brain seems to play a major part in the development of psychotic symptoms, independent of antiepileptical medications.

So far as we know, this is the first report of a psychotic reaction with a forced normalisation induced by vagus nerve stimulation. Recent studies show that c-fos expression is increased during vagus nerve action in the posterior amygdala, cingulate, mesopontine cortical, and other areas. Extensive brain areas seem to be involved and thereby a possible influence on behavioural mechanisms could not be excluded.

A randomised double blind trial versus placebo does not confirm the benefit of α-interferon in polyneuropathy associated with monoclonal IgM

The peripheral neuropathy associated with a monoclonal anti-MAG IgM is considered as a specific entity. The clinical features are different from those seen with monoclonal IgG or IgA, with sensory loss and ataxia more often found. A causal link between the monoclonal IgM and the development of neuropathy is suggested by the antibody activity of the IgM to nerve polypeptides or glycolipids. The detection of IgM deposits on the myelin sheaths of patients’ nerve biopsies, and the induction of the neuropathological process through the transfer of the anti-MAG IgM in animal models. The low rate (30%) of clinical improvement with chlorambucil (CLB) or plasma exchange in such patients justifies the search for new therapeutic strategies.

In a previous phase II open clinical trial randomly comparing intravenous immunoglobulins (IVIg) and α-interferon (α-IFN), we concluded that IVIg was inefficient but that α-IFN produced a significant clinical improvement in eight out of 10 patients at 6 months and in seven of them at 12 months. Moreover, in a double blind study of α-IFN versus placebo, the improvement of the CNDS of more than 50% main criterion, using a two sample t test. We were expecting a difference of CNDS between treatment groups of 10 with SD 10, using the estimates derived from a previous trial. Specifying a type I error of 0.05, a power of 0.90, a two sided test required 22 patients per group. Given the low incidence of the disease, the protocol was planned to be randomised with a 1:1 ratio with an interim analysis to minimise the sample size, using repeated significance tests with a nominal significance level of 0.029.

Statistical analysis was done on an intention-to-treat basis. Comparisons used a Kruskal and Wallis test for continuous variables, Fisher’s exact test for binary variables. Relations between continuous variables were studied by the Spearman coefficient. All tests were two sided. The SAS (SAS Institute, Cary, NC) software package was used.

After the inclusion of 24 patients, Roche laboratory decided not to proceed with the study any more because of trade difficulties. The promotor of the study (AP-HP) decided to carry out the interim analysis which led to the stopping of accrual of patients because of the absence of benefit of α-IFN versus placebo.

Twenty four patients were enrolled from five hospitals, 12 being assigned to α-IFN and 12 to placebo. Eleven patients (five in the α-IFN group, six in the placebo group) had been previously treated with CLB without improvement of the neuropathy. In 10 of them, plasma exchanges had also been unsuccessful. The mean duration (SD) of the peripheral neuropathy was 3.6 (3.9) years.
Values are median (25th–75th percentiles) or n (%).

The randomisation procedure resulted in balanced treatment groups for patient characteristics and neurological abnormalities (table). Three patients in the α-IFN group withdrew from treatment, two because of side effects (one at day 30 for diarrhoea and one at day 60 for influenza symptoms) and one because of worsening of the neuropathy. No patients had to stop treatment because of haematological toxicity.

The mean CNDS did not change significantly in either group, and the α-IFN group, it moved from 31.4 at baseline to 28.5 at 6 months, in the placebo group from 30.3 at baseline to 27.8 at 6 months. The absolute differences were close in the two randomised groups—namely, 1.8 in the α-IFN group and −2.5 in the placebo group (p=0.84) and the relative differences were also close (−6% v 6.5% respectively, p=0.79). In both groups, three out of 12 patients (25%) had improvement in CNDS of more than 20% (p=1.00). Electrophysiological data were available in nine patients treated with α-IFN and in 11 patients treated with placebo and did not detect significant improvement (data not shown).

In this double blind study of α-IFN versus placebo, we did not confirm the efficacy of α-IFN in peripheral neuropathy associated with a monoclonal anti-MAG IgM as suggested in a preliminary phase II open study. This discrepancy is not easy to explain. The mean baseline neurological scores, the number of patients previously treated, and the disease duration were the same in the two studies. However, both studies dealt with small cohorts. We think that the effect found in our preliminary study could have been amplified by the enthusiasm of physicians and patients in favour of interferon, a new therapeutic strategy that at the time was promising in neurological diseases, given that the trial was not blind. Both physicians and patients knew that it was not a placebo group. Interestingly, in our preliminary study, the decrease of the CNDS was mainly due to improvement in sensory symptoms (most of them subjective) and to subjective assessment by the patient. Moreover, we could not elucidate the potential mechanism of action of α-IFN as neither the level if monoclonal IgM nor the anti-MAG antibody activity was modified. In conclusion, these disappointing results of α-IFN in monoclonal IgM associated neuropathy point out to the need of double blind randomised studies versus placebo in neurological diseases where sensory symptoms are predominant. In monoclonal IgM associated neuropathy, new strategies leading to eradication of the B cell clone secreting monoclonal IgM, such as the use of fludarabine or anti-B cell monoclonal antibodies, should be tested in further studies.

Reversible posterior leukencephalopathy syndrome induced by granulocyte stimulating factor filgrastim

Posterior leukencephalopathy syndrome is characterised by visual disturbances, altered mental status, drowsiness, seizures, headache, and occasionally focal neurological signs. It is usually associated with severe hypertension and has most often been seen in patients treated with immunosuppressive drugs such as cyclosporin A, tacrolimus, and interferon-α. The granulocyte and granulocyte macrophage stimulating factor filgrastim (Neupogen) is used in chemotherapy induced bone marrow suppression. By contrast with molsidomost (Leukomax®) filgrastim is supposed to have fewer CNS side effects. Intracranial hypertension and convulsions have been reported after molgramostim therapy. Only one case of recurring encephalopathy and focal status epilepticus due to filgrastim is published. In that case the contrast enhanced CT was normal.

We report a case of reversible posterior leukencephalopathy syndrome with transient bilateral changes in the occipital and parietal regions involving the white matter on MRI induced by filgrastim. This is to our knowledge the first case report of reversible changes on MRI to be reported after filgrastim therapy.

A 45 year old previously healthy woman was diagnosed with high grade non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma with intermediate to high malignancy in August 1999. The first cycle of chemotherapy with vincristin, ifosfamide, and etoposid was well tolerated. Two days after termination of chemotherapy she received subcutaneously 300 µg filgrastim (Neupogen) daily because of bone marrow suppression with leukopenia for 9 days. After 3 days the dose was increased to 600 µg/day. One day after termination of filgrastim and almost 2 weeks after chemotherapy, she developed acute cortical blindness within 30 minutes. On the next day simple partial and complex partial seizures, non-convulsive status, agitation, and desorientiation followed. Brain MRI obtained 1 day later showed bilateral hyperintensities in the parietal and occipital regions involving white matter with some involvement of the underlying grey matter on proton density images (figure). Non-convulsive status with somnolence and disorientation were documented by EEG, which showed a bilateral parieto-occipital focus with continuous rhythmic delta
The pathogenesis of posterior leukencephalopathy in the absence of severe hypertension. A typical posterior leukencephalopathy syndrome primarily involves parietal and occipital regions with white matter hyperintensities on proton density-weighted imaging. Within a few hours, symptoms showed hyperintensities in the parietal and occipital regions involving white matter in marked resolution on proton density images (figure).

This case demonstrates that the granulocyte-stimulating factor filgrastim can have marked neurotoxic side effects in the form of a typical posterior leukencephalopathy syndrome in the absence of severe hypertension. The pathogenesis of posterior leukencephalopathy syndrome has remained elusive. It probably reflects the increased vulnerability of posterior regions of the brain to different vascular, toxic, or metabolic disturbances. It has been suggested that the predilection for the posterior circulation is a consequence of poorer control of local cerebral autoregulation due to the relatively poorer sympathetic innervation. It cannot be stated whether in this case filgrastim neurotoxicity was due to direct toxic or transient vascular damage, by analogy with CNS toxicity reported after interleukin-2 therapy. Both mechanisms seem possible.

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reappearance of the dystonic movements. Under these conditions, the patient presented with distinct bilateral miosis, but no other disturbances.

Through this provocation test, the diagnosis was confirmed. As a result of an adverse reaction to fentanyl, the patient experienced an acute and unusual neurological syndrome. The clinical symptoms were agitation, generalised myoclonus, intermittent disturbances of consciousness, fluctuating bilateral hemiparesis, and pinpoint pupils. The diagnosis remained obscure for 72 hours due to the continuing ventilation, sedation, and analgesic treatment with fentanyl; indeed, it was the continuing administration of fentanyl that was maintaining the symptoms. Both the improvement after cessation of fentanyl, and the controlled provocation test confirmed the diagnosis.

In recent years, various central side effects of opioids have been described. These include generalised myoclonus, hyperalgesia, grand mal seizures, and agitation. Although some reports have shown unexpected central side effects (after low doses of fentanyl), in most cases this type of effect developed in patients receiving high doses of opiates for prolonged periods.

Opiate induced myoclonus is often generalised and is either periodic or associated with rigidity, often occurs in the context of underlying medical conditions, and usually responds to either naloxone or benzodiazepines. The mechanisms responsible for these adverse effects are not exactly known, but opioidergic, serotonergic, dopaminergic, and other mechanisms are considered. The interesting feature of this particular case was the possibility of confusion of an acute fentanyl induced adverse syndrome with basilar artery thrombosis.

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Relapsing alternating ptosis in two siblings

In this Journal, Peatfield described the recurrence of cluster headaches presenting with a virtually painless Horner’s syndrome in a 56 year old man. This publication caused controversy on the dissociation between autonomic dysfunction and pain during cluster headache. We add to this discussion our report on relapsing alternating ptosis in two siblings:

A 46 year old woman had intermittent episodes of alternating ptosis for more than 8 years. Her 47 year old sister was affected similarly. As shown in figure 1, attacks occurred more often than once a month with a mean duration of the episodes of 8 days (range 3–14 days). Intrinsic oculomotor muscles and the bulbous muscles were spared (fig 2). She never complained about double vision. Elevating and maintaining the ptotic eyelid in a fixed position during sustained upward gaze did not result in a drop of the opposite eyelid. Signs of autonomic dysfunction and miosis were absent. The ptosis was never accompanied by miosis. There was no history of migraine or cluster headache. However, during the episodes they experienced some mild aching at the frontal region. On the serotonin antagonist pizotifen, the younger sister felt improved due to slightly prolonged symptom free intervals. However, 60 mg prednisone every day for 6 weeks did not change the occurrence of ptosis.

On repeated neurological examination, there was no abnormality apart from the fluctuating ptosis. Magnetic resonance imaging of the brain, the orbital region, and the cervicothoracic spinal cord segments were normal. Laboratory studies showed no abnormality. Westergen sedimentation rate and serum creatine kinase activity were normal. Repeated tests for antiacetylcholine receptor antibodies were negative. Low rate repetitive nerve stimulation did not result in pathologic decremental responses. Thyroid hormones and antibodies were in the normal range and absent, respectively. In the symptom free interval, pupillary responses to various pharmacological agents did not indicate a sympathetically mediated dysfunction.

Relapsing alternating ptosis in two sisters is unique. In some aspects, our observation resembles Bielschowsky’s relapsing alternating ophthalmoplegia. Distinctive clinical features of this rare syndrome are the intermittent evolution of external ophthalmoplegias, the alternate involvement of one eye after the other, the constant sparing of the intrinsic oculomotor muscles, and the absence of pain.

We think that our finding of relapsing alternating ptosis is related to intermittent sympathetic dysfunction. Interestingly, in a subgroup of patients with cluster headache a “partial” Horner’s syndrome may develop during each attack and disappear as the attack subsides. The term “partial” Horner’s syndrome indicates that in patients with cluster headache one or two components of the typical Horner’s syndrome are present—that is, miosis or ptosis, whereas a third characteristic, anhidrosis, is lacking or even replaced by hyperhidrosis. Some of the patients with cluster headache even show a permanent Horner-like syndrome on the symptomatic side. Several studies on the pupil responsive-ness in patients with cluster headache would be needed.
indicate that dysfunction of the sympathetic nervous system, whether peripheral or central, is involved in the pathophysiology of the cluster headache. Additionally, alternating Horner’s syndrome has been reported in patients with lesions of the lower cervical and upper thoracic spinal cord segments. In those cases, Horner’s syndrome may alternate sides at intervals ranging from 2 hours to 2 weeks. Horner’s syndrome alternating on a daily basis can occur rarely in multisystem atrophy with dysautonomia. Unfortunately, we cannot offer any proof for a sympathetic dysfunction in our patients.

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BOOK REVIEW


Some books deserve their title and others, like this one, definitely do not. For this is not a comprehensive survey of the British contribution to neurology through 250 years. Thank goodness; because such an account could so easily be familiar and self-important.

Instead, Clifford Rose has assembled a delightful and quixotic collection of essays from an international panel of authors; only six of the 20 contributors are British. He has eschewed the predictable; the chapter on Gowers, for instance, is devoted solely to his promotion of the use of shorthand in medicine. Of the three chapters on Hughlings-Jackson, one is an extrapolation of his ideas on neurophysiology to the archaeological record of human mental evolution. Humour abounds from even the most unpromising subjects. “There is something especially delicious about controversy and acrimony,” writes Robert Gordon on the Bell Magendie debate in his inquisitive chapter on collecting antiquarian neurological books. The diplomatic skills of John Fothergill, who described trigeminal neuralgia in the 18th century, are carefully recorded. A patient, the Earl of Macclesfield, asked him over the dinner table whether the food they were eating was wholesome: “Does your Lordship like it?” Fothergill asked. Yes, the Earl replied. “Does it agree with your Lordship?” Yes. “Why then it is wholesome”. Compston describes the anatomical illustrations of 18th and 19th century neurological texts to illustrate the emerging clinicopathological technique. CU Smith makes an excellent case for stressing the importance of the young JZ Young’s visit to Naples in 1928, where he rediscovered the squid giant axon that was to become such a fruitful experimental model in the hands of Hodgkin and Huxley and Curtis and Cole. In 1940 Young was to write “unfortunately work was terminated by the outbreak of war which rendered the capture of squids impossible”.

Purists may be upset that familiar neurological icons are not given the usual plaudits; in particular, in 274 pages, there are only four passing references to the National Hospital, Queen Square. But the familiar can be boring and this compulsive little book most certainly is not.

ALASDAIR COLES

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