Tumor thrombus: A rare cause of acute stroke

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ABSTRACT

Stroke is common in our everyday practice as doctors and radiologists. The stroke pathways have steadily improved over the last number of years with the advent of dedicated stroke units; synchronized streamlined care with endovascular stroke therapies, leading to improved outcomes. We present the case of a 57-year-old woman complaining of sudden onset right-sided facial droop and right-sided weakness. The case represents an unusual cause for an atypical stroke with multiple learning outcomes.

Key words: Anticoagulant therapy, Radiologist, Stroke, Tumor

CASE REPORT

A 57-year-old woman complained of sudden onset right-sided facial droop and weakness of the right upper and lower limbs while having dinner. The patient was subsequently blue-lighted to the University Hospital Galway.

Urgent computed tomography (CT) scan was performed after the initial assessment by the on-call medical team. Assessment by the medical team yielded right-sided hemiparesis and moderate dysarthria. The motor loss affected the upper limbs more than the lower. The National Institutes of Health Stroke Scale score of 12 was calculated [3].

Non-contrast CT revealed diffuse right cerebral low attenuation with loss of gray-white matter differentiation throughout the distribution of the right middle cerebral artery (MCA) (Fig. 1a). Hyperdense right MCA sign was also noted (Fig. 1b). The Alberta Stroke Program Early CT Score was calculated as 4. CT angiogram was performed and revealed an occlusive thrombus in the mid-right M1 segment of the right MCA (Fig. 1c).

Initial urgent findings were discussed with the medical team on call and the neurointerventional radiology department; however, the patient was not suitable for thrombectomy given the established large territory of infarction. Thrombolysis was administered given that the patient was within the appropriate window for treatment. The patient was admitted to the stroke unit for further supportive management.

Request details from intensive care unit (ICU) included new clinical information: There had been an acute change in the patient’s status including new seizure-like activity with mydriasis. A clinical question regarding infarct or hemorrhagic transformation was generated. A follow-up CT was emergently performed. CT confirms the presence of a dense region of low attenuation throughout the right MCA territory as expected based on prior known thrombus within the vessel. There was a new midline shift consistent with edema-related mass effect. Interestingly, there were subtle areas of low attenuation in the left occipital lobe and new patchy areas within the left frontal lobe suggesting early multifocal left-sided infarcts (Fig. 2). The patient was intubated, clinically in disseminated intravascular coagulation, and not suitable for any intervention at this stage.

After some time of ICU discussion, it was established that the patient had a history of prior lung cancer. Further, investigations

Access this article online

Received - 10 May 2023
Initial Review - 22 May 2023
Accepted - 29 July 2023

Quick Response code

DOI: ***

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requested including a repeat CT brain and CT thorax, abdomen, and pelvis (CT TAP) were performed to establish the underlying cause of the multifocal infarcts.

The previous CT brains had revealed the atypical clinical presentation of multifocal infarcts raising the probability of an embolic source. The bedside echocardiogram in ICU was clear. A contrast-enhanced CT TAP was performed immediately after the CT brain (Fig. 3a). CT TAP revealed a soft-tissue mass in the anterior mediastinum directly invading the arch of the aorta with tumor thrombus present within the arch of aorta and brachiocephalic artery (Fig. 3b). CT TAP revealed a soft-tissue mass in the anterior mediastinum invading the arch of aorta posteriorly with multiple filling defects within the arch of the aorta and soft-tissue mass anteriorly invading the vessel with extensive tumor thrombus.

DISCUSSION

Direct tumor thromboembolism from recurrent lung carcinoma is rare. The original paper describing this phenomenon was a direct pulmonary arterial invasion causing stroke [4]. A number of case reports have described the occurrence of stroke either from lung tumor invasion into the pulmonary veins [5] or direct invasion of the atria [6]. Another case report documented extensive tumor thrombus within the abdominal aorta causing lower limb ischemia and further intracranial infarct [7].

The optimum treatment for embolic tumor-causing stroke is mechanical thrombectomy as proven in other studies [8]. Unfortunately, this patient did not progress to mechanical thrombectomy given the extent of the established infarct and progressive deterioration of the clinical condition. A recent Japanese study by Siegler et al. found that mechanical thrombectomy is potentially beneficial in returning the patient to baseline up to 24 h after the initial infarct with large vessel occlusion (LVO) [9].
CT perfusion will continue to improve the interpretation of the ischemic penumbra and hopefully inform therapeutic benefits from salvage thrombectomy [10]. To the best of our knowledge, no exact case report involving a recurrent lung tumor invading the arch of aorta with subsequent tumor thrombus leading to multifocal acute infarct has been described in the literature. There have been several studies discussing the phenomenon of acute stroke as the first presentation of atrial myxoma. In one study, it was suggested that systemic thrombolysis is suitable for patients with stroke from atrial myxoma [11].

Based on available case studies, mechanical thrombectomy forms the mainstay of management in acute infarct secondary to tumor thrombus [8,12-14]. Unfortunately, in this case, the extent of initial infarction ruled out the possibility of thrombectomy from the treatment options available. The subsequent left-sided infarcts may not have been preventable given the extent of direct tumor invasion. This case demonstrates a good example of a rare cause of multifocal stroke secondary to tumor thromboembolism. This should always be considered in atypical presentations and in patients with relevant clinical history.

CONCLUSION

Stroke is a common presentation to hospitals around the world and the etiology is frequently unknown. Our case highlights the need to always consider an atypical source of emboli, particularly in the setting of multifocal infarcts. Mechanical thrombectomy forms the mainstay of management in this context; however, consideration must be given to the risk of further infarcts based on the embolic source. Early discussion with interventional services is advised; however, patients can benefit up to 24 h after the initial insult.

REFERENCES


Funding: Nil; Conflicts of interest: Nil.

How to cite this article: Mullins MJ, O’Sullivan GJ. Tumor thrombus: A rare cause of acute stroke. Indian J Case Reports. 2023; August 14 [Epub ahead of print].