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Tahira Naru
Aga Khan University, tahira.naru@aku.edu

Mohammad Khurshid
Agha Khan University, mohammad.khurshid@aku.edu

Zafar Nazir
Aga Khan University, zafar.nazir@aku.edu

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Case Report

Maternal and Fetal Complications of Antiphospholipid Syndrome: a case report with long-term follow-up

Tahira Naru1, Muhammad Khurshid2, Zafar Nazir3
Departments of Obstetrics & Gynaecology1, Medicine2 and Surgery3, The Aga Khan University, Karachi.

Abstract

We report a case of a 26-year old woman having antiphospholipid syndrome in pregnancy with long-term follow up. She presented with recurrent miscarriages, venous thrombosis, avascular necrosis of femoral head, mid-cerebral artery infarction and skin ulcers. Antiphospholipid syndrome is a recognized disorder of pregnancy. Diagnosis requires a high index of suspicion when evaluating women with recurrent pregnancy losses and vascular thrombosis. A low dose aspirin combined with heparin can reduce morbidity and improves the pregnancy outcome.

Case Report

A 26-year-old Pakistani primigravida was admitted in April 1989 at 8 weeks of gestation with a painful right leg. On examination, the right leg was swollen; calf circumference measured 32cm on the right vs 29.5cm on left and the over-lying skin was congested. Passive movements of the calf were painful. A diagnosis of popliteal vein thrombosis was made on Doppler examination and patient was started on intravenous heparin (1000 units/hour). Complete blood count showed thrombocytopenia (30X109/L). Further investigation was performed at 31 weeks of gestation. The baby died four weeks later due to complications of prematurity. She was discharged on fifth post-operative day on low-dose aspirin. She conceived for the fifth time in 1997, and received treatment as mentioned earlier. A healthy baby boy (weight 3.1kg) was delivered at 37 weeks of gestation by Caesarean section. The patient was discharged on fifth post-operative day on low-dose aspirin. She conceived for the fifth time in 1997, and received treatment as mentioned earlier. A healthy baby boy (weight 2.6kg) was delivered. Due to the nature of disease, tubal ligation was discussed with the patient.

In 1999, another episode of popliteal vein thrombosis was initially managed with heparin infusion (30,000U daily). Later she was switched to warfarin followed by low-dose aspirin. Her sixth pregnancy in 2001 was complicated by severe intrauterine growth restriction (biophysical profile: 6/10 with suboptimal cardiotocography at 29 weeks of gestation). Dexamethasone was administered to promote lung maturity and an elective Caesarean section with tubal ligation was performed. A baby boy (weight 980 grams) was delivered and transferred to neonatal intensive care unit. The patient developed severe hypertension and thrombocytopenia on fourth postoperative day for which she received beta-blockers and corticosteroids. In January 2002, she developed pain in the left lower limb and skin ulcers. An MRI revealed avascular necrosis of femoral head. In view of her progressive symptoms and functional disability, a total hip arthroplasty was advised.

In 2003 she developed stroke and MR angiography showed middle cerebral artery infarction. On a recent follow-up, she was undergoing physiotherapy. Her current therapy includes warfarin, beta-blocker, low-dose aspirin, and cholesterol lowering agent.

Discussion

Antiphospholipid syndrome (APS) is characterized by the presence of antiphospholipid (aPL) antibodies belonging to a family of immunoglobulins that bind negatively charged phospholipids, phospholipids binding proteins or both. These include lupus anticoagulants (LAC), anticardiolipin (aCL) antibodies and anti beta 2 glycoprotein -1; a co-factor required for the action of LAC and aCL. Antiphospholipid syndrome is a complex multisystem disorder. This syndrome occurs in isolation (primary APS) or...
within context of several autoimmune disorders (secondary APS). Sapporo criteria are considered acceptable for the diagnosis of APS. These include unexplained or repeated pregnancy loss around 10 weeks of gestation and positive aCL IgM and IgG or LAC antibodies on at least 2 occasions 6 weeks apart. The reported patient manifests several features of APS such as venous thrombosis, repeated pregnancy loss and high titres of aCL and LAC antibodies.

Prevalence of APS varies according to the population assessed, and the Immunoassay used to detect aPL antibodies. The study published by Lockwood et al found a prevalence of 2.2% for aCL and 0.27% for LAC antibodies in low risk obstetrics patients. The association of positive aPL and LAC antibodies with recurrent fetal loss is well established and varies between 4.6 and 50.7% (mean 15.5%) and 0 and 14% (mean 8.3%) respectively. The presence of aPL antibodies is also associated with placenta insufficiency, fetal growth restriction, preeclampsia and preterm delivery.

In addition to influencing pregnancy outcomes, APS may affect any organ of the body and display a broad-spectrum of manifestations. These include deep venous thrombosis (31.7%), thrombocytopenia (21.9%) pulmonary embolism (9%), transient ischaemic attacks (7%), stroke (13.1%), myocardial infarction (2.8%), skin ulcers (3.9%) and rarely a catastrophic syndrome characterized by widespread vascular occlusion (0.8%). Most of these systemic features can be explained by vasculopathy and occlusion of small vessels due to platelet aggregation and subsequent thrombosis.

Asymptomatic avascular necrosis (AVS) of femoral head is seen on MRI in 20% of patients with primary APS. Though sporadic cases of bilateral or unilateral AVN of femoral and tibial head has been reported in patients with primary APS who were not receiving corticosteroids. Use of corticosteroids in treatment of APS may aggravate the risk of avascular necrosis of bones. It is difficult to interpret the current literature to determine the optimal treatment of APS in pregnancy. The recent trials have focused on comparison of low-dose aspirin alone with steroids or heparin. In a multicenter randomized trial no difference was found in live birth rates when low-dose aspirin and heparin was compared with low-dose aspirin and prednisolone, but patients who received prednisolone were reported to have increased risk of maternal morbidity and preterm delivery. The review of therapeutic trials has revealed that the combination of heparin and aspirin may reduce pregnancy loss by 54%.

References