Monosystem Multifocal Langerhans Cell Histiocytosis (Multifocal Eosinophilic Granulomas of the Bone) in a 36-Year Old Patient: Case Report, Therapeutic Doubts and Review of Literature

Siniša Roginić1, Damir Buković2, Ksenija Pešek1 and Dubravko Tršinski3

1 General Hospital Zabok, Department of Internal Medicine, Zabok, Croatia
2 University of Zagreb, Zagreb University Hospital Center, Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics, Zagreb, Croatia
3 General Hospital Varaždin, Department of Internal Medicine, Varaždin, Croatia

ABSTRACT

Our aim is to provide review of available studies on Langerhans cell histiocytosis (LCH) and discuss treatment for polyostotic monosystem form of disease based on our clinical experience. LCH is an enigmatic disease with insufficiently understood etiology, pathophysiology, and variety of clinical presentations ranging from solitary eosinophilic granuloma to severe multisystem disease. It is marked by formation of granuloma in practically any organ. We present rare case of multifocal bone disease in 36-year old patient without visceral involvement. Treatment protocols for adult LCH patients, especially for uncommon form in our case have not yet been defined. Our therapeutical trial with corticosteroids showed limited success with numerous side-effects. We conclude that LCH treatment can commence only after diagnosis and staging of the disease. Other factors like patient’s age, comorbidity, general condition, severity of symptoms and contraindications for therapy modalities should also be considered. In our experience expectative approach has better clinical outcome than immunosuppressive therapy in patients suffering from polyostotic multifocal form LCH with mild symptoms.

Key words: Langerhans cell histiocytosis, eosinophilic granuloma, corticosteroids, polyostotic, treatment

Introduction

Langerhans cell histiocytosis is a rare disease with mostly unexplained etiology and pathophysiology characterized by pathological accumulation of Langerhans cells in various body organs. Recent findings classify it as a histiocytosis – a group of proliferative disorders of monocyte-macrophage system cells. Other members of this group are insufficiently understood macrophage disorders: hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis, Castleman and Rosai-Dorfman disease. Langerhans cell histiocytosis (LCH) is traditionally divided into three clinical entities: Abt-Letterer-Siwe disease (fulminant disseminated form, predominant in children under age 2), Hand-Schüller-Christian disease (chronic disseminated form with involvement of bone and internal organs) and eosinophilic granuloma (chronic localized bone disease). Practically every organ can be involved. Significant overlapping has been observed studying three disease presentations mentioned above. For instance, patient presenting with solitary eosinophilic granuloma can gradually evolve into multisystem form involving internal organs. Therefore new classification was developed with much greater emphasis on treatment and prognosis of LCH dividing it into monosystem and multisystem form. Monosystem form is further subdivided into unifocal and multifocal (monostotic and polyostotic in case of bone affection). First records of LCH date from 1893 when 3-year old boy with diabetes insipidus, exophthalmus, hepatosplenomegaly, bronze dry skin and petechiae was described. Lichtenstein recognized these three seemingly separated clinical entities as parts of unique disease and named it histiocytosis X (X stands for unknown cause). In 1973 it was discovered that Langerhans cells are responsible for
histiocytosis X. Langerhans cell histiocytosis has been the most frequently name used in medical terminology since then\(^4\).

Epidemiological data on LCH are very sparse due to low incidence and the fact that clinicians rarely consider it as a differential diagnosis. More than 50% of described cases affect children. We still lack sufficient data on adult patients; incidence is estimated by some authors as 1 to 2 cases per million with most patients presenting with multisystem form of disease (69%). Median of incidence in children with monosystem form is between 5 and 15, and 2 years for multisystem form of disease\(^5\). Pulmonary LCH is more prevalent among smokers, therefore many cases of remission have been described after quitting\(^1\)\. There is a slight predominance among male patients in osseus disease, but all other forms are more prevalent among women\(^5\)\(^6\).

Etiology is also mostly unknown. There are two confronted theories. Some authors explain cell proliferation as a malignant neoplastic process supported by finding of monoclonal Langerhans cells in lesions. Another group considers proliferation as an augmented immune system response to enviromental antigens which are yet to be identified. Finding of Glotzebecker et al. identified human herpes virus type 6 (HHV6) in 71% of examined eosinophilic granulomas. This makes HHV6 a possible pathogen\(^4\). Diniz et al. described eosinophilic granuloma as an inflammatory reaction to periapical tooth infection which lends support to the theory of LCH as a cytokine network malfunction disorder. Smoking is widely accepted as a risk factor for pulmonary LCH\(^1\)\(^4\). Hereditary factors might be involved because 1% of patients reported positive family history and identical twins show 86% concordance\(^1\). Etiology is yet to be clarified but it is most probably a consequence of innate immune system predisposition to react to some enviromental antigen with an abnormal proliferation of Langerhans cells.

Pathological finding is uniform regardless of disease manifestation. Lesions comprise of activated Langerhans cells surrounded by interdigitating cells, macrophages, T lymphocytes, multinuclear histiocytes and eosinophils. Besides characteristic morphology, Langerhans cells are further identified histochemically by the presence of Cdl a and S-100 surface markers and electromicroscopically by the presence of Birbeck granules\(^3\)\(^2\). Above mentioned pathological findings are obligatory for diagnosis.

Clinical presentation is extremely diverse since LCH can involve virtually any organ leading to the delay in correct diagnosis of approximately 4 months. Most of the clinical data have been acquired among children, with only few studies describing disease in adults\(^4\). LCH is more likely to occur in tissues with abundant reticuloendothelial system. Bones are affected in 70% of patients, predominantly skull, pelvis, proximal femur, ribs and mandibule (common disease localization in adult patients)\(^2\). Rarely, eosinophilic granulomas can be found in vertebrae. Most clinical reports found solitary bone lesions, but affected bones can be a part of multisystem disease. Reports on polysotytic monosystem LCH without visceral involvement are very sparse, mostly as case reports or minor group of patients in retrospective studies. Some bone lesions are asymptomatic, others present with localized pain in 90% of affected patients. Chronic otitis media, sinusitis, mastoiditis and pathological fractures have also been described. Cranial base involvement can cause diabetes insipidus, the most common endocrinopathy in LCH patients. 20% of pediatric cases of diabetes insipidus are caused by histiocytosis with increasing incidence in adult population. Other organs can be involved solitary or as a part of multisystem disease. Granulomas can be found in liver, spleen, bone marrow (associated with unfavorable prognosis), central nervous system, digestive tract (causing malabsorption in children), skin (seborrheic intertriginous exanthema) and lymph nodes. Peculiar site is a female genital tract because lesions can mimic some sexually transmitted diseases\(^3\)\(^4\). Pulmonary LCH is commonly described as a separate entity causing interstitial lung disease which can lead to irreversible pulmonary fibrosis\(^4\). Multisystem form of LCH can begin insidiously with general symptoms such as low grade fever, malaise, myalgia and the loss of appetite. Clinical presentation is more acute in younger patients. The most fulminant disease form occurs in children under age 2, sometimes with lethal outcome.

After establishing clinical indication, diagnosis is determined by imaging techniques and confirmed pathohistologically by finding of atypical Cda1+ and S100+ Langerhans cells with Birbeck granules\(^4\). Conventional radiograph can diagnose most lesion as osteolytic areas surrounded by reactive sclerosis which can also be found in numerous malignant bone conditions, e.g. osteosarcoma\(^2\). Spread of the disease is estimated by bone radiouclide scan and positronic emission tomography (PET) while computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) assess granuloma relation to surrounding anatomical structures. High resolution CT (HRCT) is a preffered test for the assessment of pulmonary LCH and MR is more convenient to show soft tissue involvment (especially brain). Laboratory investigations in every patient should include complete blood count, blood urea nitrogen, electrolytes, liver and renal function tests, erythrocyte sedimentation rate, alkaline phosphatase, serum and urine osmolality.

Differential diagnosis is extensive and depends on clinical form of LCH and patient’s age. In adult patients with bone involvment it should include bone metastases, plasmocytoma, primary bone tumors, fibrous dysplasia and ameloblastoma\(^2\).

**Case Report**

36-year old male came to his physician and was complaining of right hip pain, headache, tinnitus and hearing loss in his right ear. Family history was unremarkable. In childhood he had suffered from bilateral congenital hip dysplasia. He was previously diagnosed with psoriasis vulgaris. The patient smokes one pack of cigarettes a day while the rest of history is unremarkable. During work-up for tinnitus multiple lytic areas on calvaria crani were spotted using cranioGram (Figures 1a and b). Since MRI of head showed them as multiple soft tissue forma-
tions, clinical suspicion of LCH was established. Further imaging (CT of the head) located one of those lesions on tip of the pyramid pressuring vestibulocochlear nerve and thus explaining patient’s audiological symptoms.

Frontal bone biopsy confirmed the diagnosis of eosinophilic granuloma. Further radiological and laboratory workup (ultrasound of abdomen, lymph nodes and heart, chest and bone X-rays, bone marrow biopsy) determined spread of disease. Multiple bone granulomas (on humerus, scapula, ribs, skull, proximal femur and pelvis) were identified without any internal organs involved. Bone marrow biopsy excluded malignant proliferation. Due to intensive pain and patient’s history of hip dysplasia additional pelvic CT was ordered showing significant hip destruction caused by eosinophilic granulomas combined with consequences of delayed treatment of hip dysplasia.

Current symptoms and possibility of disease progression compelled us to start a treatment with metilprednizolon 1 mg/kg/day, gradually reducing dosage combined with prophylactic bisphosphonate treatment. After 7 months of treatment there was no improvement in patient’s condition and PET-CT of affected regions indicated neither disease progression nor regression (Figures 2a and b). However, patient developed characteristic corticosteroid therapy adverse effects: cushingoid ap-

Fig. 1. a) Craniogram (lateral projection) showing multiple lytic areas in frontal, parietal and temporal bones marked by arrows. 
   b) Anteroposterior projection.

Fig. 2. a) PET-CT showing persistent confluenting lesions of calvariae cranii after 7 months of corticosteroid therapy (arrows).
   b) Extensive destruction of frontal bone.
treated with monotherapy. Complete remission in those susceptibility of spread to the brain and high relaps rate if monosystem disease and granulomas in high-risk loca-

tions (e.g. anterior and middle cranial fossa) due to po-

monostotic form of LCH6. Two clinical studies exist for children8,9 and there are two more under way. First randomized controlled study in adult patients started in 2004. First of the above mentioned studies showed similar outcomes in children treated with vinbla-

stin or etoposide, with higher rate of etoposide toxicity8. Second study showed better results combining etoposide or vinblastin with prednisone. Ongoing adult patients study implements 6 or 12 month protocol of combined chemotherapy only in cases of viceral involvement and localiza-
tion of granulomas. Most studies recommend chemotherapy in patients with monosystem granulomas disease form is not as frequent as solitary form and is usually accompanied by visceral manifestation, which is not the case with our patient. Defining universal therapy guidelines is troublesome due to low incidence and insufficient data from clinical studies. Radiotherapy, surgical extirpation and corticosteroid infiltration were not the option for our patient due to dissemination and localization of granulomas. Most studies recommend chemotherapy only in cases of viceral involvement and severe symptoms. Additionally, current protocol used in clinical trial for adult LCH (LCH-A1) is under scrutiny due to high incidence of vinblastin-induced polyneuro-

pathy. In our experience long-term corticosteroid therapy results in minor clinical and radiological improvement in disease natural course, but causes multiple adverse effects, especially steroid diabetes. Therefore current treatment without unique guidelines should be strictly individual, following pathohistological diagnosis and detailed staging. Patient’s age, general condition, comorbidity, severity of symptoms and contraindications for some therapy modalities should also be considered. Only after assessment of above parameters we can decide between ex-

pectative approach with rigorous checkups and active treatment by means of surgery, radiotherapy, immu-
nomodulation or chemotherapy. Our experience advo-
cates expectative approach in patients with monosystem polyostotic form of LCH.

Some children with chemotherapy resistant multisys-
tem form of disease benefit from alogenic bone marrow transplantation10. Most authors concur that corticoste-
roids and smoking cessation are reasonable first line
treatment for pulmonary LCH. Lung transplantation is also an option for refractory cases1,4.

Discussion

Decision about treatment is made after final diagno-
sis and disease staging (monosystem or multisystem). We are confronted with two difficult doubts: should adult pa-
tients with mild to moderate symptoms receive any sys-
temic treatment in paucity of clinical guidelines on con-
ducting that treatment. Many cases of spontaneous disease remission have been described (even in multisystem form) contributing to unpredictability of LCH clinical course1. Most authors agree that expectative approach can be applied in patients with solitary eosinophilic granulomas if they cause no pain, deformity or loss of function.

Otherwise there are multiple treatment modalities: solitary, easily accessible lesions can be surgically extir-
pated, intraliesional corticosteroid application and radio-
therapy are also possible1,2,6. Although clinical guidelines are still under development, chemotherapy is widely used in treating multisystem form of LCH6. Two clinical studies exist for children8,9 and there are two more under way. First randomized controlled study in adult patients started in 2004. First of the above mentioned studies showed similar outcomes in children treated with vinbla-

stin or etoposide, with higher rate of etoposide toxicity8. Second study showed better results combining etoposide or vinblastin with prednisone. Ongoing adult patients study implements 6 or 12 month protocol of combined vinblastin and prednisone treatment with addition of 6-mercapto-
tapurine. Former protocol is used to treat polyostotic monosystem disease and granulomas in high-risk loca-
tions (e.g. anterior and middle cranial fossa) due to pos-
sibility of spread to the brain and high relaps rate if treated with monotherapy. Complete remission in those patients was usually achieved after second cycle of treat-
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REFERENCES


S. Roginić
Department of Internal Medicine, General Hospital Zabok, Bračak 8, 49210 Zabok, Croatia
e-mail: sinisa.roginic@gmail.com

MONOSISTEMSKI MULTIFOKALNI OBLIK HISTIOTICE LANGERHANSOVIH STANICA (VIŠESTRUKI EOZINOFILE GRANULOMI KOSTIJA) KOD 36-GODIŠNJEG BOLESNika: PRIKAZ SLUČAJA, TERAPIJSKE DVOJBE I PRIKAZ LITERATURE

SAŽETAK