

STRACHAN-SCOTT SYNDROME IN A MODERN CONTEXT: A CASE REPORT AND REHABILITATION PERSPECTIVE

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Background

Strachan-Scott Syndrome, also known as Tropical Ataxic Neuropathy (TAN) or Jamaican Neuropathy, was first described in 1887 by Dr Henry Strachan among plantation workers in Jamaica. It is characterized by a triad of optic neuropathy, painful symmetrical sensory polyneuropathy and less commonly, auditory symptoms. Other features may include ataxia, mucocutaneous lesions and nutritional deficiencies—particularly riboflavin (B2) and B12. Though historically linked to undernutrition and cassava consumption, it remains under-recognised especially in individuals of Afro-Caribbean descent.

Case report

We present a 35-year-old Afro-Caribbean woman, born in United Kingdom, with morbid obesity, mental health comorbidities and alcohol excess, who became bedbound following progressive neuropathic symptoms. Initial symptoms began over two years ago and worsened during a visit to Jamaica and after bereavement. She reported visual disturbances, symmetrical limb paraesthesia, weakness and incontinence without hearing loss or significant ataxia. Examination revealed reduced lower limb power, areflexia, sensory loss up to the knees, and finger-nose ataxia. MRI spine showed dorsal column signal changes without compressive myelopathy. NCS confirmed severe sensory axonal polyneuropathy. Investigations revealed vitamin B12 deficiency and elevated acylcarnitine levels. Despite extensive workup, an underlying metabolic disorder was not confirmed. Given clinical features and background, a diagnosis of Strachan-Scott Syndrome was made. Rehabilitation challenges Management involved riboflavin and B-vitamin supplementation, pain control, bladder/bowel retraining, neuropsychological support and tailored mobility rehabilitation. Her significant obesity posed challenges in mobilisation and assessment including failed lumbar puncture. She improved with physiotherapy and was discharged to step-down rehabilitation.

Conclusion

Strachan-Scott Syndrome is a neglected yet potentially reversible neuropathy. Awareness among rehabilitation physicians is crucial particularly in at-risk populations to facilitate timely diagnosis, nutritional support and functional recovery.

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