Austrian Syndrome: A Disease Of The Past?

Abstract
Invasive pneumococcal infection is a re-emerging complication of Streptococcus pneumoniae infection. Austrian syndrome is a rare triad of pneumococcal pneumonia, meningitis and endocarditis associated to a very high mortality. We hereby present a case of infective aortic endocarditis in a Caucasian woman with severe heart failure and emergency valve replacement in a patient treated with meningitis and pneumonia.

Keywords
Streptococcus pneumonia; Meningitis; Endocarditis; Austrian syndrome

Introduction
Since the advent of antibiotics in the 1930s the mortality associated with invasive pneumococcal infection (IPI) resulted in a rapid decline [1]. In recent years, a larger number of cases have been reported due to penicillin-resistant Streptococcus pneumoniae strains [2]. Austrian syndrome is a rare triad of pneumococcal pneumonia, meningitis and endocarditis [3]. We hereby present a case of infective aortic endocarditis with severe heart failure and emergency valve replacement in a patient treated with meningitis and pneumonia.

Case Report
A 50-year-old Caucasian woman was admitted at the Neurology department referring one week of headache. She had a history of hypertension, diabetes mellitus and morbidity obesity (body mass index 34). She smoked 20 cigarettes per day but denied alcohol or intravenous drugs abuse. She had an opioid-based analgesia (intrathecal morphine pump) due to postlaminectomy chronic lumbar pain since 2003. Reservoir refill was scheduled monthly with its last manipulation few days before the development of clinical symptoms. No prior pneumococcal vaccination was recorded. On admission, her temperature was 38.2˚C, arterial blood pressure 115/75mmHg, respiratory rate 20 breaths/min and heart rate was regular to 86 beats/min. Clinical examination showed Glasgow Coma Scale score (13) and also had a neck stiffness.

The white blood cell count was 16360 cells/mm 3 with 13740 neutrophils and haemoglobin level was 10.2 g/dL. Platelet count 189/μL. No abnormalities were detected on chest radiography (Figure 1). A lumbar puncture was performed and documented a mobile endocardial vegetation of 9mm attached to the noncoronary sinus with a massive regurgitating jet leading to severe aortic insufficiency (Figures 3 and 4). The patient was transferred for emergency heart surgery with extraction of the morphine reservoir previously administered. Severe destruction of the left and right coronary cusps and vegetations on the noncoronary cusp were found. The aortic valve was replaced by a mechanical prosthesis (Carbomedics nr.21).

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A polymerase chain reaction from the native aortic valve confirmed the presence of bacterial DNA from S. pneumoniae. Following liaison with infectious diseases specialist, she completed an appropriate course of 42 days of ceftriaxone plus 28 days of vancomicine. With a triad on pneumococcal meningitis, pneumonia and endocarditis, a diagnosis of Austrian syndrome was made. On a follow-up of one year after discharge home, she

Figure 1: Chest X-ray on admission.
remained stable with no significant anatomic or functional heart abnormalities.

**Discussion**

The incidence of infective endocarditis by pneumococci was reduced to less than 3% after the use of penicillin [3]. However, the mortality rate remains high and the incidence of pneumococcal endocarditis has increased worldwide over the past 10 years [4]. Robert Austrian reported 8 cases of pneumonia, endocarditis and meningitis, of which 6 died because of aortic regurgitation [5]. As in our case, the patients usually presented with pneumonia and/or meningitis, initially responding to parenteral penicillin but subsequently developing endocarditis. The delayed diagnosis of pneumococcal endocarditis can contribute to delayed-onset heart failure[4].

Traditional risk factors for IPI are alcoholism, chronic lung disease, prolonged steroid use, diabetes mellitus, haematological malignancies, chronic renal disease, pregnancy, postpartum period, pandemic H1N1 infection and HIV infection/ acquired immunodeficiency syndrome [5-9]. In pneumococcal endocarditis, the native aortic valve is the most frequent location of vegetations. Despite appropriate antibiotic therapy, the clinical course is usually acute and very aggressive leading to rapid haemodynamic instability [3]. According to commonly accepted guidelines [10], surgery should be considered as soon as the definite diagnosis has been established.

Empiric antibiotic treatment includes ceftriaxone or cefotaxime with vancomycin. If there is resistance to cefotaxime, rifampicin should be added to the vancomycin. Our hospital is an active member of a multicenter Spanish Pneumococcal Endocarditis Study Group (Appendix). An amount of 2064 cases of IE have been collected since 2007. In 20 cases S.pneumoniae was the causative agent and just one case of Austrian syndrome has been observed.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, our case highlights the re-emerging problem of endocarditis caused by penicillin-resistant strains of S. pneumoniae being mandatory the exclusion of pneumonia and meningitis in the presence of bacterial endocarditis.

**References**


