primary pseudotumor cerebri syndrome in a young obese african woman

ludo t. molobe md1, jemal shifa md2, canuto silava md4, kabo mojela mbchb1, francesca Cainelli md1,3 and sandro Vento md3

1department of medicine, princess marina hospital, gaborone, botswana
departments of 2surgery and 3internal medicine, university of botswana, gaborone, botswana
4village imaging, gaborone, botswana

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22 year old, obese (body mass index 41) black african woman presented at princess marina hospital, gaborone, botswana with a 2 week history of repeated episodes of diffuse headache exacerbated by the valsalva manoeuver and accompanied by light intolerance, dizziness, neck pain and blurred vision. the day before presenting she had had an episode of visual loss. at presentation the patient was oriented and her blood pressure, pulse, respiratory rate and temperature were normal. she had no neck stiffness; reflexes, tone, sensation and motility were normal. however, limited abduction and no light perception of the right eye were noted. hematology and biochemistry examinations were within normal limits. antinuclear antibodies were negative.

fundoscopy revealed bilateral papilledema with flame hemorrhages, and engorgement of the veins and exudate bilaterally, i.e., features of acute papilledema [figure 1]. a brain computerized tomography scan and magnetic resonance imaging [figure 2] showed no abnormality, and a cerebrospinal fluid study only revealed high csf pressure. a diagnosis of primary pseudotumor cerebri syndrome (idiopathic intracranial hypertension) was made.

the patient was treated with tapering doses of prednisolone (initially 100 mg daily), amitriptyline (25 mg daily), propranolol (80 mg daily) and acetazolamide (1 g daily). her condition improved and 2 months later the papilledema was resolving, although exudate was still present in both maculae and the vision of the right eye was poor.

idiopathic intracranial hypertension, or primary pseudotumor cerebri syndrome, is a rare neurologic disorder of unknown etiology characterized by chronically increased intracranial pressure and symptoms and signs of a space-occupying intracranial mass (headache, transient visual obscurations, papilledema) in the absence of a mass or ventricular obstruction [1-3]. it generally presents in women of childbearing age and has no racial predilection. obesity and recent weight gain occur more frequently in these patients [4]. obesity might contribute to the pathogenesis by increasing the intraabdominal pressure and the cardiac filling pressure and therefore impeding the venous return from the

figure 1. fundoscopy showing papilledema with flame hemorrhages, engorgement of the veins and exudates: [a] right eye, [b] left eye

figure 2. brain mri showing no abnormalities
brain and increasing the intracranial pressure, or through neuroendocrine effects on the mineralocorticoid receptor which is abundant in choroid plexus epithelial cells that regulate CSF production.

Treatment for primary pseudotumor cerebri syndrome is intended to reduce intracranial pressure and thus prevent visual loss and headaches. Medical treatment includes a low sodium weight-reduction diet, carbonic anhydrase inhibitors, steroids, digoxin and loop diuretics. Surgical treatment (nerve sheath fenestration, lumbo-peritoneal shunt, ventriculoperitoneal shunt, or subtemporal decompression) is necessary for patients unresponsive to therapy [5].

References

Mycobacterium tuberculosis causes an infection that can sometimes kill, but it proceeds to disease in only about 10% of individuals. Now, Montoya and team provide a clue to how most people keep this bacterium in check. They show that when people fight tuberculosis, their immune cells secrete the cytokine interleukin-32, which may work through an antimicrobial pathway that uses vitamin D. The researchers analyzed five different clinical data sets and found that interleukin-32 may indicate latent tuberculosis. Interleukin-32 therefore may both contribute directly to the host response to tuberculosis and reflect protection against the disease.

“It is a truism that almost any sect, cult, or religion will legislate its creed into law if it acquires the political power to do so”

Robert A. Heinlein (1907-1988), American science-fiction writer