Dear Editor,

Reversible splenial lesions of the corpus callosum have been reported in a variety of disease conditions. Mild encephalitis/encephalopathy with a reversible splenial lesion (MERS) is the most common occurrence of reversible splenial lesions [1]. New-onset refractory status epilepticus (NORSE) is a rare neurological emergency condition, and manifests as antiepileptic drug-resistant refractory status epilepticus with poor prognosis [2]. Here, we report a case of NORSE that presented with a reversible splenial lesion on MRI at the disease onset and responded to targeted temperature management (TTM) and immunotherapy.

1. Case presentation

A 30-year-old male suddenly had tonic-clonic convulsions seven days after a preceding fever and diarrhea. Four days later, he was admitted to a general hospital with a severe headache. Three days after hospitalization, tonic-clonic convulsions suddenly occurred (Fig. 1A). T2 and fluid-attenuated inversion recovery (FLAIR) and diffusion-weighted imaging (DWI) showed a high-intensity signal in the splenium of the corpus callosum (Fig. 1B). Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) fusion-weighted imaging (DWI) showed a high-intensity signal in the splenium of the corpus callosum (Fig. 1B). Cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) testing showed an increase in the number of cells (total 260/mm³, neutrophils 204 vs lymphocytes 56) and the level of protein (65 mg/dl). Cultures of blood and stool were negative for any bacteria, and CSF were negative for human simplex virus in a polymerase chain reaction test. The patient was initially diagnosed with MERS and treatment with methylprednisolone pulse (1 g/day for 3 days) started on the day after admission did not improve the patient’s general condition, and convulsions were alleviated. After a total of 16 rounds of PLEX, his status epilepticus remarkably improved and, for a few hours, he could respond to simple instructions. Although PLEX seemed to be effective, his seizures had remitted and continued. Moreover, he had extremely high fever (> 42 °C). The patient entered a shock and disseminated intravascular coagulation state on day 29, and developed heart failure. We considered his condition an “autonomic storm”. From day 31, we used continuous hemodiafiltration, and the patient’s fever decreased. We started TTM using the Arctic Sun 5000 system (Medivance, Inc., Louisville, CO, USA), with the target body temperature set at 37.0 °C. Using this temperature-control system, the patient’s condition, we started plasma exchange (PLEX). After a total of nine rounds of PLEX, his status epilepticus remarkably improved and, for a few hours, he could respond to simple instructions. Although PLEX seemed to be effective, his seizures had remitted and continued. Moreover, he had extremely high fever (> 42 °C). The patient entered a shock and disseminated intravascular coagulation state on day 29, and developed heart failure. We considered his condition an “autonomic storm”. From day 31, we used continuous hemodiafiltration, and the patient’s fever decreased. We started TTM using the Arctic Sun 5000 system (Medivance, Inc., Louisville, CO, USA), with the target body temperature set at 37.0 °C. Using this temperature-control system, the patient's general condition was stabilized and convulsions were alleviated. After a total of 16 rounds of PLEX, his status epilepticus and disturbed consciousness improved. The patient was transferred to a rehabilitation hospital on day 124, and discharged home 1 1/2 months later.

2. Discussion

This case reveals two important clinical issues. First, NORSE can present with a reversible splenial lesion. Second, TTM and
immunotherapy are useful for the treatment of a patient with NORSE who has a high fever.

The MRI findings of a patient with NORSE can show a reversible splenial lesion. MERS is the most common cause of reversible splenial lesions [1]. Febrile infection-related epilepsy syndrome (FIRES), which is found mainly in children, is defined as a subgroup of NORSE [3]. Both NORSE and FIRES present with super-refractory status epilepticus, and have unfavorable outcomes [3]. There is one report of reversible splenial lesions in a child with FIRES [4], and there might be one case in NORSE [5]. It is unclear why splenial lesions occurred in these cases while they are not seen in many other cases of NORSE. In these cases, when the splenial lesions appeared, there were no metabolic abnormalities and no infections, and no medication had been administered.

TTM and immunotherapy may be useful for the treatment of NORSE. The etiology of NORSE is thought to be wide, and includes viral and autoimmune causes [6,7]. TTM has been reported to be useful for neuroprotection from various brain injuries [8,9]. Management of hypothermia is considered to inhibit all destructive processes at the brain injury site, such as excitotoxicity, neuroinflammation, apoptosis, and free radical production [10]. TTM has been reported as useful for children with acute encephalopathy [11]. Although the previous case reported by Mao et al. [5] showed good recovery without TTM, our case showed an obvious decrease in seizure episodes and clinical improvement of consciousness after the introduction of a combination therapy of TTM and immunotherapy.

To summarize, our case shows that a reversible splenial lesion on MRI does not always indicate mild encephalopathy, and that a TTM/immunotherapy combination might be useful for patients with high fever but no infection. Clinicians should therefore, in suspicious cases of NORSE, consider aggressive treatment including TTM and immunotherapy.
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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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Akane Unno Mizutani a, Akihiro Shindo b, Shigeo Arikawa a, Takuya Shimada a, Keita Matsusura a, Kaoru Ikejiri b, Kei Suzuki b, Hiroshi Imai b, Hidekazu Tomimoto b

a Department of Neurology, Mie University Graduate School of Medicine, Tsu, Mie, Japan

b Mie University Hospital, Emergency and Critical Care Center, Tsu, Mie, Japan

E-mail address: a-shindo@clin.med.mie-u.ac.jp (A. Shindo).

⁎ Corresponding author at: Department of Neurology, Mie Graduate School of Medicine, 2-174 Edobashi, Tsu, Mie, Japan.