Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.
Case report

Cervical spinal cord infarction associated with coronavirus infectious disease (COVID-19)

Joshua Kahana, Cameron J. Gibson, Sara B. Strauss, Matthew Bronstein, Robert J. Winchell, Philip S. Barie, Alan Z. Segal

A 31-year-old male with no known medical history was admitted to a network inpatient facility with eight days of an acute respiratory illness, which was confirmed by reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction of a nasal swab sample to be COVID-19. On hospital day (HD) 6, he was intubated for worsening respiratory failure and transferred to our facility the next day. His vital signs upon admission were T 35.6°C, HR 126 beats/min, BP 147/93 mm Hg, and RR 18 breaths/min. Neurologic examination revealed spontaneous movement of all four extremities, with no focal findings. There were no other abnormalities on physical examination. Laboratory data are shown in Table 1. Previous undiagnosed diabetes mellitus was identified (hemoglobin A1c, 12.7%). Hypercoagulability was confirmed by rotational thromboelastometry (ROTEM).[7] Blood cultures and duplex ultrasonography of the lower extremities were normal.

Once admitted to our ICU the patient was started on enoxaparin 80 mg subcutaneously every 12 h for aggressive thromboprophylaxis [8]. Desired anti-coagulation was confirmed by an anti-factor Xa concentration of 0.7 IU/mL (therapeutic range, 0.5–1.0 IU/mL) on HD 9. Over the following four days mechanical ventilation, vasopressor therapy, and sedation were weaned. There was an isolated recorded blood pressure of 60/37 on HD 8, however on detailed chart review this was reversed with increasing vasopressors within moments. Blood pressure was otherwise consistently at target. The patient moved all extremities during daily sedation holidays. On the morning of HD 12 the patient was unable to move his lower extremities and endorsed absent sedation below the nipples. Up to that point, he had maintained oxygen saturation > 90% and was normotensive. Formal neurologic evaluation revealed that cranial nerves were intact except for multilateral nystagmus. Sensation to light touch and pinprick were intact above the nipples, but absent caudally. The sensory level was at the T4 dermatome. Power of the upper extremities was present but...
diminished bilaterally (bilateral deltoid muscle 2/5, bilateral triceps muscle 2/5, right biceps muscle and wrist extensors 2/5, left biceps muscle and wrist extensors 3/5, bilateral hand grip 1/5). Power of the lower extremities was absent bilaterally (0/5, flaccid paralysis). He was areflexic except for a weak left biceps tendon reflex. Plantar responses were mute. Clonus was absent. Using the International Standards for Neurological Classification of Spinal Cord Injury (ISNCSCI), the upper extremity motor sub-score was 17/50, lower extremity motor sub-score was 0/50, sensory sub-scores were 44/112, and the American Spinal Injury Association Impairment Scale was A.

Additional serum laboratory values included elevated beta-2 microglobulin (2.6 mg/L; normal range, 1.2–2.4 mg/L), normal immunoglobulin A (227 mg/L; normal range 85–499 mg/dL), normal ganglioside Gm1 antibody (IgG) (5 IU; normal range 0–50 IU) and ganglioside Gm1 antibody (IgM) (16 IU; normal range 0–50 IU); aquaporin-4 IgG and myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein (MOG) IgG were undetectable. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the spinal cord with and without gadolinium (Fig. 1) revealed pronounced T2 hyperintensity and enhancement of the cervical spinal cord spanning C4 through C6 with corresponding restricted diffusion and patchy enhancement mostly within the central gray matter, highly concerning for acute-to-subacute spinal cord infarction. Intramedullary edema surrounded the area of infarction extending from the cervico-medullary junction, predominantly involving the dorsal columns, and extending caudally to T1, where it involved predominantly the central gray matter. Lumbar puncture and MRI of the brain were not performed acutely in the interest of infection control. Despite negative serology, differential diagnosis also included neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorder, MOG antibody associated demyelination, sarcoidosis or a viral transverse myelitis. Given the possibility of a potentially reversible inflammatory process, the patient received methylprednisolone 1 g daily for 5 days, but without improvement. Considering the clinical course, serologies and imaging, we felt the most likely diagnosis was spinal cord infarction. He required tracheostomy for ventilator dependence and gastrostomy for nutritional support.

As in sepsis generally, COVID-19 disease is characterized by interactions between inflammatory and coagulation cascades [5], but the hypercoagulable state associated with COVID-19 disease is distinct from the typical hypocoagulable state of bacterial sepsis, which is associated with thrombocytopenia. Therapeutic anticoagulation has been advocated in view of recent observations of pathologic clotting in COVID-19 [9,10], and a suggestion of a survival benefit for critically ill patients [10]. Neurologic associations with COVID-19 are numerous, including both central and peripheral neurologic symptoms [2–4]. The distribution of cord injury in this case does not conform to classically described vascular distributions of the anterior or posterior spinal arteries, and instead is in central “watershed” areas. This pattern is usually associated with prolonged hypotension in the setting of cardiac arrest [11]. A case series (n = 60) comparing MRI features of spinal infarcts and inflammatory lesions secondary to neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorder suggest that while anterior cord predominance is more consistent with infarct, of the 39 patients with infarcts, 24 had central cord imaging changes on axial slices [12]. Moreover, longitudinally extensive T2 hyperintensity has been observed in the setting of spinal cord infarction, and is attributed to secondary vasogenic edema can be seen in the brain [13]. Of note, the presence of diffusion restriction is not specific for infarct, and it has been seen with inflammatory etiologies [14].

It should be highlighted that because CSF analysis was not performed due to infection control practices at the time, there remained significant clinical uncertainty to justify a trial of high dose steroids. The lack of clinical improvement following steroids is more suggestive of a cord infarct, but not conclusive. Spinal cord pathology associated with the Covid-19 pandemic has included primary spinal epidural abscesses [15], two published case reports of acute myelitis [16,17] - both of which showed neurological improvement with high-dose steroids, and two cases of possible infarction [18].

Table 1

| Parameter (normal value) | HD 7 | HD 12 |
|--------------------------|------|-------|
| C-reactive protein (<0.9 mg/dL) | 1.3 | <0.4 |
| D-dimer (0–229 ng/mL) | 1.952 | 619 |
| ESR (0–20 mm/hr) | 63 | 74 |
| Fibrinogen (180–400 mg/dL) | 699 | 348 |
| Interleukin-6 (<5 pg/mL) | 916 | 43 |
| Lactate dehydrogenase (118–230 U/L) | 618 | 356 |
| Partial thromboplastin time (27.6–36.6 sec) | 39.2 | 50.0 |
| Prothrombin time (9.9–12.5 sec) | 13.2 | 11.4 |
| Platelet count (150–450 x 10^3/microliter) | 335 | 265 |
| White blood cell count (3.4–11.2 x 10^3/microliter) | 11.5 | 9.4 |

Fig. 1. MRI of the cervical spine. (a) Sagittal DWI and (b) ADC demonstrate restricted diffusion extending from C4 through C6. (c) Sagittal T1-weighted imaging with gadolinium and (f) axial T1-weighted imaging demonstrate corresponding stippled enhancement, predominantly within central gray matter. (d) Sagittal STIR and (e) axial T2-weighted imaging demonstrate T2 hyperintensity extending from the cervico-medullary junction to the level of the T1 vertebral body.
Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References

[1] Asadi-Pooya AA, Simani L. Central nervous system manifestations of COVID-19: A systematic review. J Neurol Sci 2020 Apr 11 (Epub ahead of print).
[2] Mao L, Jin H, Wang M, et al. Neurologic manifestations of hospitalized patients with coronavirus disease 2019 in Wuhan, China. JAMA Neurol 2020 Apr 10 (Epub ahead of print).
[3] Lodigiani C, Iapichino G, Carenzo L, et al. Humanitas COVID-19 Task Force. Venous and arterial thromboembolic complications in COVID-19 patients admitted to an academic hospital in Milan, Italy. Thromb Res 2020;191():9–14.
[4] Oxley TJ, Mocco J, Majidi S, et al. Large-vessel stroke as a presenting feature of Covid-19 in the young. N Engl J Med 2020. Apr 28 (Epub ahead of print).
[5] Jose RJ, Manuel A. COVID-19 cytokine storm: The interplay between inflammation and coagulation. Lancet Respir Med 2020 Apr 27 (Epub ahead of print).
[6] Guan WJ, Ni ZY, Hu Y, et al. China Medical Treatment Expert Group for Covid-19. Clinical characteristics of coronavirus disease 2019 in China. N Engl J Med 2020;382:1708–20.
[7] Tanaka K, Bolliger D, Vadalamudi R, Nimmo A. Rotational thromboelastometry (ROTEM)-based coagulation management in cardiac surgery and major trauma. J Cardiothorac Vasc Anesth 2012;26:1083–93.
[8] Paranipe I, Fuster V, Lala A, et al. Association of treatment dose anticoagulation with in-hospital survival among hospitalized patients with COVID-19. J Am Coll Cardiol 2020 May 5 (Epub ahead of print).
[9] Helms J, Tacquard C, Severac F, et al. CRICS TRIGGERSEP Group (Clinical Research in Intensive Care and Sepsis Trial Group for Global Evaluation and Research in Sepsis). High risk of thrombosis in patients in severe SARS-CoV-2 infection: A multicenter prospective cohort study. Intensive Care Med 2020 May 4 (Epub ahead of print).
[10] Connors JM, Levy JH. COVID-19 and its implications for thrombosis and anticoagulation. Blood 2020 Apr 27 (Epub ahead of print).
[11] Vargas MI, Garini J, Szyszko R, et al. Spinal cord ischemia: practical imaging tips, pearls, and pitfalls. AJNR Am J Neuroradiol 2015;36(5):825–30. https://doi.org/10.3174/ajnr.A4118.
[12] Hsu JL, Cheng MY, Liao MF, et al. A comparison between spinal cord infarction and neuromyelitis optica spectrum disorders: Clinical and MRI studies. Sci Rep 2019;9(1):7435. Published 2019 May 15. 10.1038/s41598-019-43606-8
[13] Gondo T, Kurihara M, Sugiyama Y, et al. Longitudinally extensive vasogenic edema following spinal cord infarction. Neurology and Clin Neuroscience. 2018;6(5):143–145. Published 2018 June 27. doi.org/10.1111/ncn3.12215
[14] Zanin L, Saraceno G, Panciani PP, et al. SARS-CoV-2 can induce brain and spine demyelinating lesions. Acta Neurochir (Wien) 2020;162(7):1491–4. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00701-020-04374-x.
[15] Khedr EM, Karim AA, Soliman RR. Case Report: Acute Spinal Cord Myelopathy in Patients With COVID-19. Front. Neurol 2020;11:.https://doi.org/10.3389/fneur.2020.610648,610648.