Medical debulking with BRAF/MEK inhibitors in aggressive \textit{BRAF}-mutant craniopharyngioma

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Author contributions:

A. L. Di Stefano and S. Gaillard: study concept and design, acquisition and interpretation of data, drafting manuscript, responsible for research integrity.

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BRAF activating mutations have been detected in nearly all craniopharyngiomas of the papillary subtype with interesting implications for patients with suboptimal tumor control.

Here we report that combined treatment with BRAF and MEK inhibitors resulted in major clinical benefit in the case of a patient with a BRAF V600E-mutant papillary craniopharyngioma rapidly progressing after surgery.

A 55-year-old woman was diagnosed with a suprasellar neoplasm after a rapid increase in body weight and combined pituitary hormone deficiency. Visual field test was normal.

A partial surgical resection was performed via a trans-sphenoidal approach achieving ~20% of tumor debulking with excision limited by intra-operative bleeding.

Histological analysis showed a BRAF V600E positive papillary craniopharyngioma, qPCR-high-resolution melting confirming the presence of the somatic BRAF c.1799T>A, p.Val600Glu mutation.

Post-operative follow-up MRI showed a dramatic increase in tumor volume (up to 67% compared to post-operative imaging) three months after surgery, with pressure on the optic chiasma.

Based on large tumor volume, its worringly rapid growth and the potential detrimental effect on the visual and hormonal functions, the multidisciplinary tumor board of our institution proposed a front-line treatment with BRAFi and MEKi.

According to previous case reports, we inferred that our patient might benefit from medical tumor debulking with BRAFi followed by a second surgery and/or local irradiation. We opted for combined BRAF/MEK inhibition, which demonstrated superior oncological outcomes compared to BRAFi monotherapy in BRAF V600E-mutant melanoma.

The patient started a combination of oral dabrafenib 150 mg BID and oral trametinib 2mg QD 5 months after surgery. MRI performed the day treatment was started (day 0) showed a further increase in tumor volume reaching 12.1 cm³.

Control MRI performed 72 days after starting BRAFi/MEKi showed dramatic tumor shrinkage (~94.5% compared to day 0 imaging).

Combined treatment was well tolerated with grade 1 fatigue (CTCAE v4.0), coughing and peripheral edema requiring temporary interruption of trametinib.

After 132 days of treatment, given the persistence of a residual tumor measuring 0.5 cm³ in an area hardly accessible to a second surgery, we proposed the patient should undergo proton beam radiotherapy (PBRT). Dabrafenib and trametinib were discontinued 7 days (day 208 in Figure 1) before starting PBRT to avoid all adverse events related to radiosensitization.
Control MRI performed the day before starting PBRT (day 214 in Figure 1) showed an increase of the cystic component of the tumor (13%, 0.7 cm$^3$), which further progressed to 1.5cm$^3$ (with total volume of 2.5cm$^3$) during the third week of PBRT (day 234 in Figure 1A) and then stabilized at subsequent MR imaging.

The patient was able to continue PBRT without relevant toxicity, for a total dose of 52.2 Gy RBE in 29 fractions.

At last follow-up performed 18 weeks after the end of PBRT (corresponding to day 385 in Figure 1A), the patient is free of new symptoms, with cystic component as well as the total tumor volume decreased to 0.14 cm$^3$ and 0.45 cm$^3$ respectively. Despite sustained tumor control, pituitary function did not improve, but visual field remained normal.

In summary, our case showed that combined treatment with BRAFi/MEKi can achieve rapid tumor control in patients with BRAF-mutant craniopharyngiomas rapidly progressing after surgery.

Combined short-course BRAFi/MEKi therapy produced an efficient tumor debulking and allowed the dramatic reduction of the volume treated with local radiotherapy.

Interestingly, close imaging follow-up showed an initial cystic recurrence 7 days after BRAFi/MEKi discontinuation, suggesting that some patients may present a BRAFi/MEKi dependent evolution requiring adequate treatment planning.

While treatment with BRAFi/MEKi should be considered a potential life-saving strategy in relapsing patients, neoadjuvant approaches should also be discussed in order to reduce the morbidity associated with local treatments and to contribute to functional sparing.
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Legend to Figure 1: Targeted inhibition of BRAF/MEK pathway in a patient with a recurrent papillary craniopharyngioma. A) Timeline from first presentation is indicated in days. T1-weighted (sagittal), contrast-enhanced (coronal) and T2-weighted (coronal) images of MRI performed at diagnosis (day -199). Follow up MR performed 3 months after surgery showing progression (day-54). Medical therapy with dabrafenib and trametinib was started at day 0. Subsequent MR imaging during medical therapy showed major tumor response at day 72 and 132. Anti-BRAF anti-MEK inhibitors were stopped at day 208 and RT was started at day 215. After the anti-BRAF and anti-MEK discontinuation and during RT we observed an initial increase of the tumor, mainly of the cystic component (at day 214 and 234) followed by stabilization and final reduction (day 327, corresponding to the last follow-up). Tumor volume measure at corresponding time points are showed in panel B). Enhancing (red) and cystic (blue) components as well as the total volume (green) variations are indicated.

Tumor volumes were calculated by semi-automatic segmentation using Myrian® Expert, v2.7.1, Intrasense, France.software.

Of note, in MR imaging at day 0 contrast-enhancement is reduced (i.e. half gadolinium dose compared to other MRIs) due to an incidental extravasion the during contrast-agent infusion.

PBRT = proton beam radiation therapy.
Figure 1

A

Day -159 -134 0 132 124 234 237 385

Surgery

Dobrafenib

Trametinib

PBRT

B

Volume (µm³)

Day

-200 -150 -100 -50 0 50 100 150 200 250 300 350 400

Dobrafenib

Trametinib

PBRT

Enhancing

Cysts

Total Volume