INTRODUCTION

Glioblastomas usually spread by local growth and infiltration rather than by dissemination and metastasis, despite histologic appearances that may be just as malignant as systemic tumors that metastasize widely. Although the development of an extraneural metastasis from gliomas is rare event, the reports were accumulated (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 14, 15). We report a rare case of glioblastoma that metastasized to the cervical lymph node. It was diagnosed by fine needle aspiration and showed good response to chemotherapy consisted of procarbazine and vincristine while primary intracranial glioblastoma continued to grow during chemotherapy. We discuss possible explanations for these different courses after chemotherapy in extraneural metastatic glioblastoma and primary intracranial glioblastoma.

CASE REPORT

A 35-yr-old female presented with multiple neck masses. The patient complained recent aggravation of headache and nausea. During the last 4 yr, she had four separate craniotomies for recurrent brain tumors. Cytological diagnosis was made by light microscopy with immunostaining with glial fibrillary acid protein. Chemotherapy with vincristine and procarbazine was performed. The cervical masses were decreased in size and some disappeared while the intracranial glioblastoma continued to grow during chemotherapy. We discuss possible explanations for these different courses after chemotherapy in extraneural metastatic glioblastoma and primary intracranial glioblastoma.

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The incidence of extraneural metastases from primary central nervous system tumors is around 0.5% (11). In gliomas it is estimated to approach 20-25 cases per five-year period (3). The most frequent metastatic gliomas are medulloblastoma and malignant astrocytoma/glioblastoma, followed by ependymoma (7).

Metastatic spread of malignant astrocytomas is not unusual and mainly localized to the neuroaxial spread by way of the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF). The incidence of CSF spread in glioblastomas was reported about 20% in autopsy series (5, 16). However, the incidence of symptomatic neuroaxial spread is almost certainly lower than the incidence seen at postmortem (8, 13). Vertosick et al. (13) reported that in 600 cases of supratentorial glioblastoma seen over a 10 yr period, only 11 patients with symptomatic brain stem or spinal cord metastases were identified. Although extraneural metastases of glioblastomas occur in less than 1% of cases, glioblastomas account for about two thirds of the neuroepithelial tumors that metastasize extraneurally (11). The lungs, pleura, lymph nodes, bone marrow, bone and liver are the most common recipients of distant metastases. Among the lymph node metastases, 62% were situated in the cervical areas, often ipsilateral to the site of craniotomy but sometimes bilateral (9).

A variety of hypotheses have been advanced to explain the rarity of extraneural spread of glioblastomas. It has been suggested that glioblastomas are prevented from metastasizing by the impassable dura, by the extracellular matrix, by the tough basement membrane that surrounds intracerebral blood vessels, and by the lack of true lymphatics in the brain (9, 15). Bernstein and Woodard (2) showed that the vital basement membrane was a deterrent to intravasation of glioblastoma cells into the blood vessels.

Extraneural metastases of glioblastoma are most commonly with surgical procedures that may have a chance to access to extracerebral structure, such as ventricular shunting or repeated craniotomies (9). In most cases of lymph node involvement the patients has undergone repeated craniotomies (6), and presumably the tumor gains access to lymphatics by dural or scalp extension through the surgical defect (15).

In addition to clinical history, immunocytochemistry sustained the cytological diagnosis of metastatic glioblastoma on lymph node. The smear from cervical lymph node showed the characteristic features for high-grade gliomas, such as abundant cellularity, necrosis and glomeruloid capillaries (6). The individual tumor cells were small and displayed marked pleomorphism (6, 12). Immunocytochemistry revealed numerous cells with strong immunoreactivities to GFAP antibody (1, 6). Primary intracranial glioblastoma is relatively easy to
recognize histologically. However, in the case of extraneural metastasis, a differential diagnosis with other small cell tumors, such as small cell carcinoma, poorly differentiated carcinoma, embryonal rhabdomyosarcoma and neuroblastoma, should be considered (6).

For those few glioblastomas with extraneural metastases, only palliative therapy is available when they cause symptoms although the detection of extraneural metastases is important for prediction of short survival. More discrete areas of tumor in extraneural sites such as bone can be treated with focal radiation. Soft tissue metastases sometimes respond in dramatic fashion to systemic chemotherapy (10). We decided to introduce chemotherapeutic agents to this patient because surgery was not considered any more. Steinbok et al. (12)
reported that cervical tumor decreased in size, indicating sensitivity to lomustine, but intracranial tumor was not responded, as in our case. Possible explanations of this phenomenon are inadequate drug delivery to the intracranial tumor, different sensitivities of intracranial and extraneural tumors, or a combination of these factors. Whereas the primary intracranial glioblastoma was made up of large and small cells, the metastatic tumor contained only small cell population. Therefore, small cell population of the glioblastoma might be more sensitive to the chemotherapeutic agents than was the brain tumor as a whole (12).

Presumably, extraneural spread to cervical lymph node developed through the lymphatic system from the scalp mass after repeated craniotomies in this patient. We think that fine needle aspiration and cytology is a simple and reliable diagnostic method and chemotherapy may be helpful in metastatic glioblastoma. To reveal the reason of different response to the chemotherapy between intracranial and metastatic glioblastoma, more clinical studies are needed.

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