A Navajo Patient with Morbihan’s Disease: Insight into Oculoplastic Treatment of a Rare Disease

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Summary: Morbihan’s disease is classically defined as primarily a Caucasian disease of chronic, recurrent erythema and non-pitting edema of the middle and upper thirds of the face. It is unclear whether this disease is own entity or rather an end-stage complication of rosacea. The diagnosis is based on clinical presentation, histological evaluation, and exclusion. Histological findings vary greatly in the literature, though they typically include dilated blood vessels, perifollicular fibrosis, and perivascular and perifollicular infiltration of lymphocytes. It is primarily treated medically with antibiotics or steroids or isotretinoin therapy, or with a combination of these. Morbihan’s disease, especially cases resistant to medical treatment with periorcular involvement, can lead to cosmetic disfigurement and visual obstruction, for which surgical intervention is warranted.

Morbihan’s disease was classically defined as a Caucasian disease. Morbihan’s disease has only been reported in a few non-white patients, including those of Asian, Hispanic, Black, and Asian Indian descent. We present the first reported case of Morbihan’s disease in a Navajo man and a review of the surgical management of this challenging disease.

CASE

A 55-year-old Navajo man, who resides on the Navajo Reservation, presented with a 1-year history of left upper lid (LUL) swelling (Fig. 1). His medical history was significant for a recent diagnosis of rosacea and type 2 diabetes mellitus. Oral doxycycline (100mg twice daily) and topical metronidazole (1% gel applied daily) had been prescribed for 6 months before initial surgical consultation with no significant effect. A maxillofacial CT scan was performed, demonstrating preseptal thickening and inflammation of the LUL. A punch biopsy revealed chronic inflammation, some granulomas, and histiocytes. Microbiologic workup was negative. These findings were consistent with orofacial granulomatosis or granulomatous rosacea. Ocular examination showed severe eyelid edema with induration, margin to reflex distance of −1 mm, and levator palpebrae superioris excursion of 12 mm. Owing to the significant visual impairment, a LUL debulking of the excess dermatochalasis, edematous and fibrotic orbicularis oculi muscle, and thickened septum of the upper lid was performed via a standard upper lid blepharoplasty approach: A 1.2 cm (vertical height) by 2.8 cm (width) section of skin was resected. Pathologic examination showed findings similar to the previous punch biopsy of chronic inflammation, some granulomas, and histiocytes. His visual obstruction significantly improved and there was no lagophthalmos. However, he returned 3 years later with contralateral swelling and erythema of his right upper lid (Fig. 2). Right upper lid debulking was performed through an upper blepharoplasty incision, and edematous and fibrotic orbicularis oculi muscle and thickened septum were again resected.

Disclosure: The authors have no financial interest to declare in relation to the content of this article.
A 1.4 cm (vertical height) by 2.8 cm (width) of tissue was resected. There was no functional disturbance of the eyelid after surgery. Pathological examination showed the same findings. At this point, the diagnosis of Morbihan’s disease was made due to his symptoms of the upper and middle thirds of the face, prior specimen histologic findings, and exclusion of other possible differential diagnoses such as Melkersson–Rosenthal syndrome, systemic lupus erythematosus, dermatomyositis, sarcoidosis, chronic actinic dermatitis, and contact dermatitis. Trials of methotrexate and adalimumab failed to result in any improvement. Oral prednisone was initiated with improvement of cutaneous symptoms; however, his diabetes became uncontrolled and oral prednisone was discontinued. One year later, he returned with recurrent bilateral upper and lower eyelid edema. Additional surgical debulking and injection of triamcinolone (40 mg/mL) were performed: 1 mL into each upper eyelid. His symptoms improved with the addition of the steroid injections, as his eyelids softened and became less edematous (Fig. 3). He was subsequently lost to follow-up. When he returned 2 years later, he had recurrence of symptoms in bilateral upper and lower eyelids. A second opinion from an outside oculofacial plastic surgeon was sought, and the diagnosis of Morbihan’s disease was confirmed, with no suggested deviation from the proposed medical or surgical management. Dermatology initiated isotretinoin orally, but despite this the patient had recurrence of edema with associated visual impairment bilaterally 1 year after its initiation (Fig. 4). The patient did not desire repeated surgical debulking and has been lost to follow up.

**DISCUSSION**

There is a paucity of data on the surgical management of Morbihan’s disease. Surgery is reserved for failure of primary medical therapy without significant improvement in symptoms of periorcular involvement such as visual obstruction or ectropion. Most reported cases have muscular and septal involvement with fibrosis and edema. For upper eyelids, most surgeons report using the standard blepharoplasty incision. For lower lids, most utilize a subciliary incision and excise involved portions of the orbicularis oculi muscle and orbital septum. Our patient had significant periorcular involvement with visual obstruction and involvement of the orbicularis oculi muscle and orbital septum. Our patient had significant periorcular involvement with visual obstruction and involvement of the orbicularis oculi muscle and orbital septum, which were resected. In one case report, surgeons utilized CO2 laser cautery during surgery with the debulking via blepharoplasty technique. The authors hypothesized that the laser might result in better lymphatic vessel occlusion possibly decreasing relapse rate. However, no further studies were found evaluating this proposed techniques’ efficacy.

Another described surgical technique resects all involved tissues. Méndez-Fernández et al surgically debulked the affected tissues en bloc, including the skin, and placed a split thickness skin graft on the resulting defect. This led to significant ectropion, ultimately requiring eventual full thickness skin grafts and bilateral canthopexies.

In summary, there is no gold standard for the surgical management of this rare and complex disease. In our
experience, this disease has preseptal fibrosis and inflammation involving the orbicularis oculi muscle and orbital septum. Utilizing a blepharoplasty incision for debulking allows for better cosmesis and avoids skin grafting, which can lead to ectropion or scleral show. Our patient had recurrence of symptoms after primary disease debulking, even with adjunct medical treatment. In affected patients, additional debulking procedures utilizing previous incisions are possible, as seen in repeat cosmetic blepharoplasties. Although there appears to be recurrence of symptoms in many of these patients, it is our opinion that surgical debulking utilizing a blepharoplasty incision and local steroid injections is the preferred approach for this disease, as it allows for better cosmesis and repeat surgical debulking.

We present the first reported Navajo patient diagnosed with Morbihan’s disease. This disease is primarily described in white patients, and limited studies have discussed this disease in other ethnicities. In a recent systematic review by Boparai et al, there have been 11 Asian, 2 Hispanic, 1 Black, and 1 Asian Indian cases reported in the literature to date. It is important to document this diagnosis in a Navajo patient, as it is rare in non-white patients, and to add this case to the growing body of literature about the epidemiology, diagnosis, and treatment of this disease.

CONCLUSIONS

This is the first report of Morbihan’s disease in a Navajo patient. The authors recommend utilizing a traditional upper lid or subciliary lower lid blepharoplasty incision for surgical debulking and local steroid injection when surgical intervention is warranted based on our experience, though no gold standard has been formally reported.

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PATIENT CONSENT
The patient provided written consent for the use of his image.

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