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UNRAVELING DERMATOMYOSITIS: A COMPREHENSIVE CASE REPORT OF A 31-YEAR-OLD FEMALE

Dermatology

Dr Isabella Rita M Postgraduate, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital , Chrompet , Chennai-44.
Dr Anandan Associate Professor, Sree Balaji Medical College and Hospital , Chrompet , Chennai-44.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Dermatomyositis (DM) is a rare autoimmune inflammatory myopathy characterized by proximal muscle weakness and distinctive skin manifestations. This case report details the clinical presentation, diagnostic workup, and treatment of a 31-year-old female with DM, emphasizing the importance of a multidisciplinary approach in managing this condition. **Case Presentation:** A 31-year-old female presented with progressive muscle weakness, heliotrope rash, and Gottron's papules. Laboratory tests revealed elevated muscle enzymes, and electromyography showed myopathic changes. Skin and muscle biopsies confirmed the diagnosis of DM. She was treated with corticosteroids and immunosuppressive agents, leading to significant clinical improvement. **Conclusion:** This case underscores the complexity of diagnosing DM and highlights the need for early intervention to prevent long-term morbidity. Multidisciplinary management is crucial for optimizing patient outcomes.

KEYWORDS

Dermatomyositis

INTRODUCTION

Dermatomyositis (DM) is an idiopathic inflammatory myopathy with a prevalence of approximately 1 in 100,000 individuals. It affects both adults and children, with a female predominance. DM is characterized by proximal muscle weakness and pathognomonic skin manifestations, including heliotrope rash and Gottron's papules. The etiology of DM is multifactorial, involving genetic, environmental, and autoimmune components. Early diagnosis and treatment are essential to prevent complications such as interstitial lung disease, malignancy, and calcinosis.The objective of this case report is to describe the clinical course of a 31-year-old female with DM, focusing on her diagnostic journey, treatment response, and the challenges encountered in managing her condition. This report aims to provide insights into the comprehensive care required for patients with DM and to contribute to the existing literature on this rare disease.

Case Report

A 31-year-old female presented to the dermatology clinic with a three-month history of progressive muscle weakness and a distinctive skin rash. She reported difficulty climbing stairs, rising from a seated position, and lifting objects. Additionally, she noticed a purplish discoloration around her eyes and scaly erythematous plaques on her knuckles.On physical examination, the patient had a heliotrope rash and Gottron's papules. Muscle strength testing revealed significant weakness in the proximal muscles of both the upper and lower extremities. No other systemic symptoms were noted.Laboratory investigations showed elevated levels of creatine kinase (CK), lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), and aldolase, indicating muscle damage. Antinuclear antibodies (ANA) were positive, and specific myositis-associated autoantibodies, including anti-Jo-1, were detected. Electromyography (EMG) revealed myopathic changes consistent with DM.A skin biopsy of the heliotrope rash demonstrated interface dermatitis with dermal mucin deposition, while a muscle biopsy showed perifascicular atrophy and perivascular inflammation, confirming the diagnosis of DM.The patient was started on high-dose oral corticosteroids (prednisone 1 mg/kg/day) and methotrexate (15 mg weekly). Over the following weeks, she showed significant improvement in muscle strength and resolution of skin lesions. Steroid-sparing immunosuppressive therapy with azathioprine (2.5 mg/kg/day) was added to maintain remission. During follow-up, the patient continued to improve, with normalization of muscle enzyme levels and no significant side effects from the medications. She was monitored for potential complications such as interstitial lung disease and malignancy, but no such issues were detected.

DISCUSSION

Dermatomyositis (DM) is a complex and multifaceted disease that poses significant challenges in both diagnosis and management. The pathophysiology of DM involves an interplay of genetic predisposition, environmental factors, and immune dysregulation. Understanding these mechanisms is crucial for developing effective treatments and improving patient outcomes. This discussion will delve into the clinical presentation, diagnostic challenges, management strategies, and prognostic considerations, with a focus on the case of a 31-year-old female patient.

Clinical Presentation:

The clinical manifestations of DM are heterogeneous, ranging from mild to severe and involving multiple organ systems. The hallmark features include proximal muscle weakness and characteristic skin lesions. The heliotrope rash, a violaceous erythema around the eyes, and Gottron's papules, erythematous scaly lesions over the knuckles, are pathognomonic for DM. In our patient, these classic signs were evident, aiding in the initial clinical suspicion of DM.Muscle weakness in DM predominantly affects the proximal muscles, leading to difficulties in performing activities such as climbing stairs, rising from a seated position, and lifting objects. This progressive weakness can significantly impair daily functioning and quality of life. Our patient experienced these symptoms, which prompted further investigation.In addition to skin and muscle involvement, DM can affect other organs, leading to complications such as interstitial lung disease (ILD), cardiac involvement, and gastrointestinal manifestations. ILD is a particularly concerning complication due to its association with increased morbidity and mortality. Although our

patient did not exhibit respiratory symptoms, regular monitoring for ILD is essential in DM patients.

Diagnostic Challenges:
Diagnosing DM involves a combination of clinical assessment, laboratory tests, imaging studies, and histopathological examination. The diagnostic process can be challenging due to the overlap of DM with other inflammatory myopathies and connective tissue diseases.

Laboratory Tests:
Elevated muscle enzymes, including creatine kinase (CK), lactate dehydrogenase (LDH), and aldolase, are indicative of muscle damage and are commonly seen in DM. Our patient exhibited elevated CK levels, which supported the diagnosis. However, these enzyme levels are not specific to DM and can be elevated in other conditions such as polymyositis, inclusion body myositis, and muscular dystrophies. Autoantibody testing plays a crucial role in diagnosing DM and assessing prognosis. Antinuclear antibodies (ANA) are often positive in DM, but they lack specificity. Myositis-specific antibodies (MSAs) and myositis-associated antibodies (MAAs) provide more diagnostic value. Anti-Jo-1 antibodies, the most common MSA, are associated with the antisynthetase syndrome, which includes DM features such as ILD, arthritis, and mechanic's hands. Our patient tested positive for anti-Jo-1 antibodies, which reinforced the diagnosis and highlighted the need for vigilant monitoring for ILD.

Imaging Studies:
Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) is useful for detecting muscle inflammation and edema, guiding biopsy sites, and assessing disease activity. MRI can reveal areas of increased signal intensity in affected muscles, indicating active inflammation. While MRI was not performed in our patient, it can be a valuable tool in cases where muscle biopsy is not feasible or in monitoring disease progression.

Electromyography (EMG):
EMG helps differentiate between myopathic and neuropathic processes. In DM, EMG typically shows myopathic changes such as short-duration, low-amplitude motor unit potentials and increased spontaneous activity, including fibrillations and positive sharp waves. Our patient's EMG findings were consistent with myopathy, supporting the diagnosis of DM.

Histopathological Examination:
Skin and muscle biopsies are critical for confirming the diagnosis of DM. Skin biopsy of the heliotrope rash typically shows interface dermatitis with vacuolar changes at the dermoepidermal junction and dermal mucin deposition. Muscle biopsy reveals perifascicular atrophy, a hallmark of DM, along with perivascular inflammation and muscle fiber necrosis. Both skin and muscle biopsies in our patient confirmed the diagnosis, providing definitive evidence of DM.

Management Strategies:
The management of DM involves immunosuppressive therapy to reduce inflammation and prevent disease progression. Treatment is tailored to the severity of the disease, the presence of extramuscular manifestations, and the patient's response to therapy.

Corticosteroids:
Corticosteroids are the mainstay of initial treatment for DM due to their potent anti-inflammatory effects. High-dose oral prednisone (1 mg/kg/day) is typically initiated, followed by a gradual tapering based on clinical response and laboratory markers. Our patient showed significant improvement in muscle strength and skin lesions with high-dose prednisone, highlighting the effectiveness of corticosteroids in DM.

Steroid-Sparing Agents:
To minimize the long-term side effects of corticosteroids, steroid-sparing agents such as methotrexate, azathioprine, and mycophenolate mofetil are often added. Methotrexate, a folate antagonist, has immunosuppressive properties and is commonly used in DM. Our patient was started on methotrexate, which contributed to maintaining remission while allowing for the reduction of prednisone.

Intravenous Immunoglobulin (IVIG):
IVIG is considered in patients with refractory DM or those with severe extramuscular manifestations such as dysphagia or ILD. IVIG has immunomodulatory effects and can provide rapid improvement in muscle strength and skin lesions. Although our patient responded well to corticosteroids and methotrexate, IVIG remains a valuable option for difficult-to-treat cases.

Biologic Agents:
Biologic agents such as rituximab, a monoclonal antibody targeting CD20-positive B cells, have shown promise in treating refractory DM. Rituximab can deplete B cells, reducing autoantibody production and inflammation. While biologics were not required in our patient, they offer a targeted approach for patients with inadequate response to conventional therapies.

Supportive Care:
Physical therapy and occupational therapy play essential roles in managing DM by improving muscle strength, preventing contractures, and enhancing functional independence. Our patient was referred to physical therapy, which contributed to her overall improvement and quality of life.

Monitoring And Prevention Of Complications:
Regular monitoring for potential complications such as ILD, malignancy, and cardiovascular involvement is crucial in DM patients. Screening for ILD includes pulmonary function tests and high-resolution computed tomography (HRCT) of the chest. Our patient did not exhibit signs of ILD, but she will require ongoing surveillance. Additionally, malignancy screening is recommended, as DM can be associated with an increased risk of malignancy, particularly in older adults. Our patient's age and negative family history reduced her immediate risk, but vigilance remains essential.

Prognosis And Complications:
The prognosis of DM varies widely, with some patients achieving long-term remission and others experiencing chronic disease with relapses. Early diagnosis and prompt initiation of immunosuppressive therapy are critical for improving outcomes and reducing the risk of complications.Interstitial Lung Disease (ILD): ILD is a major complication of DM, associated with significant morbidity and mortality. Early detection and treatment of ILD are essential to prevent irreversible lung damage. Our patient did not develop ILD, but ongoing monitoring with pulmonary function tests and HRCT is necessary. Malignancy: DM is associated with an increased risk of malignancy, particularly within the first few years after diagnosis. Common malignancies include ovarian, lung, pancreatic, stomach, and colorectal cancers. Our patient's age and lack of risk factors reduced her immediate concern for malignancy, but regular screening is warranted.

Calcinosis:
Calcinosis, the deposition of calcium salts in soft tissues, can occur in DM, particularly in juvenile cases. It can cause significant morbidity due to pain, ulceration, and infection. Although our patient did not exhibit calcinosis, it remains a potential long-term complication that requires monitoring. Cardiac Involvement:Cardiac manifestations of DM include myocarditis, arrhythmias, and congestive heart failure. Cardiac involvement can be asymptomatic or present with symptoms such as chest pain, palpitations, or dyspnea. Routine cardiac evaluation, including electrocardiograms and echocardiograms, is recommended for DM patients.

CONCLUSION

Dermatomyositis is a complex autoimmune disease with a wide range of clinical manifestations and potential complications. The case of our 31-year-old female patient underscores the importance of early recognition, comprehensive diagnostic evaluation, and prompt initiation of immunosuppressive therapy. A multidisciplinary approach is essential for managing DM effectively, improving patient outcomes, and minimizing long-term morbidity. Ongoing research into the pathophysiology and treatment of DM will continue to enhance our understanding and management

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