

## CASE REPORT

# A Rare Case of Acute Axonal Motor Neuropathy in a Puerperal Woman

<sup>1</sup>Ashwini Nayak, <sup>2</sup>N Sundari, <sup>3</sup>Asha Swarup, <sup>4</sup>Jyothi Girish

## ABSTRACT

We report the case of a puerperal woman who presented to us with sepsis, multiorgan dysfunction and motor weakness of both lower limbs. On detailed evaluation, patient was found to have axonal neuropathy establishing the diagnosis of critical illness polyneuropathy (CIP). A high index of suspicion is required to arrive at the diagnosis as this condition is not only associated with high mortality and morbidity rates but also can affect the quality of life of the individual in the long-term. This case has been reported to highlight the importance of recognition of this common, but rarely diagnosed condition as it can help us to portend the prognosis.

**Keywords:** Axonal polyneuropathy, Critical care, Sepsis.

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## INTRODUCTION

Critical illness polyneuropathy (CIP) is an acute disorder of neuromuscular system affecting severely ill patients. Complex pathogenetic mechanisms have been hypothesized involving metabolic, inflammatory, and bioenergetic alterations supporting microvascular changes in peripheral nerves, though its etiology remains unclear.<sup>1</sup> Usually, the motor nerve fibers are affected. Sensory fibres and cranial nerves are generally preserved.<sup>2</sup> Multiorgan failure, sepsis, and critical illness polyneuropathy have a mortality rate of 50%.<sup>3</sup> We describe a patient who developed sepsis and went into multiorgan dysfunction with lower limb weakness following delivery which prompted us to diagnose CIP.

## CASE REPORT

A 25-year-old puerperal lady presented with acute onset of pain, swelling and weakness of lower limbs for 3 days. The patient was a Para 1 Living 1 Abortion 2 and had underwent an emergency cesarean section for fetal distress 3 days prior to admission. Patient had history of fever 1 week prior to delivery. She had no previous hospitalizations or significant medical illness in the past. On examination, she was conscious and well oriented. She was febrile with a temperature of 100°F. There was pedal edema, pallor and icterus. Pulse was 92/minute and blood pressure (BP) was 140/80 mm Hg. Per abdominal examination revealed an involuting uterus. Examination of the lower limbs showed that both limbs had pitting pedal edema. Peripheral pulses were felt in both lower limbs. There was hypotonia of the lower limbs (hip flexors, extensors 1/5, quadriceps 2/5, distally 3/5). Deep tendon reflexes were absent. There was no sensory deficit. The routine urine examination showed no sugar or protein. Her hemoglobin (Hb) was 9.3 gm/dl, white blood cell (WBC) was 19,600/mm<sup>3</sup> and platelets was 1,20,000/mm<sup>3</sup>. The serum sodium was 134 mEq/l and potassium was 8 mEq/l. The hyperkalemia was corrected by parenteral infusion of calcium gluconate and 25% dextrose and insulin. The blood urea was 30 mg/dl and creatinine was 2.5 mg/dl. The serum bilirubin was 7.9 mg/dl, direct bilirubin was 7.26 mg/dl, serum glutamic oxaloacetic transaminase (SGOT) was 40 U/I and serum glutamic pyruvic transaminase (SGPT) was 35 U/I. Prothrombin time was 18.4 seconds and activated partial thromboplastin time was 32.5 seconds and INR was 1.28. She was treated with parenteral piperacillin-tazobactam and metronidazole. Nerve conduction study was done and the electrophysiological studies (EPS) showed marked decrease of compound muscle action potentials in bilateral common peroneal nerve. The sensory nerve action potentials were normal in the upper and lower limbs. The findings were suggestive of bilateral common peroneal nerve axonal motor neuropathy. Venous Doppler of the lower limbs was found to be normal. Ultrasound of the abdomen showed moderate ascites and right pleural effusion and involuting uterus. With supportive treatment patient recovered and she was discharged 15 days later with the advice to continue exercises at home.

<sup>1</sup>Associate Professor, <sup>2-4</sup>Professor

<sup>1-4</sup>Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, MS Ramaiah Medical College, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India

**Corresponding Author:** Ashwini Nayak, Associate Professor Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, MS Ramaiah Medical College, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India, Phone: 08028392953, e-mail: ms.drashwini@rediffmail.com

The patient has had regular follow-up for 3 years after discharge, and she has regained near normal power in her lower limbs.

## DISCUSSION

By definition, CIP is an acute reversible neuropathy that develops during the treatment of critically ill patients.<sup>4</sup> This newly acquired neuromuscular cause of weakness has been found in 46% (95% confidence interval 43-49%) critically ill patients with sepsis, multi-organ failure or prolonged mechanical ventilation.<sup>5</sup> Our patient presented with sepsis and multiorgan failure. Laboratory investigations are nonspecific.<sup>6</sup> Electrophysiologic findings are those of a pure axonal degeneration, affecting motor than sensory fibers.<sup>7</sup> In this patient, the electrophysiological studies showed marked decrease of compound muscle action potentials in bilateral common peroneal nerve and normal sensory nerve action potentials. Sepsis, hyperglycemia and decreased serum albumin concentrations are associated with decrease in peripheral nerve function.<sup>8</sup> The serum albumin in this patient was low (1.3 g/dl). Treatment is supportive, initially consisting of aggressive pulmonary hygiene and prevention of secondary complications of immobility, such as skin breakdown, deep venous thrombosis and superimposed compressive neuropathies.<sup>7</sup> Our patient recovered with symptomatic treatment. The recovery in patients with CIP is spontaneous but gradual.<sup>9</sup> Critical illness polyneuropathy or critical illness myopathy is associated with increased intensive care unit (ICU) and hospital stays and elevated mortality rates, although other data suggest that patient selection may partially explain this.<sup>10</sup> Our patient is

symptomatically better on follow-up and regained normal power in both her lower limbs.

## CONCLUSION

This case has been presented to highlight the importance of considering this possibility in patients who present with weakness of lower limbs in the presence of severe sepsis as this can help us to prognosticate the disease.

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