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. Usually, the motor nerve fibers are affected. Sensory fibres and cranial nerves are generally preserved. Multiorgan failure, sepsis, and critical illness polyneuropathy have a mortality rate of 50%. We describe a patient who developed sepsis and went into multiorgan dysfunction with lower limb weakness following delivery which prompted us to diagnose CIP.
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. 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. Our patient presented with sepsis and multiorgan failure. Laboratory investigations are nonspecific. Electrophysiologic findings are those of a pure axonal degeneration, affecting motor than sensory fibers. 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. 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. Our patient recovered with symptomatic treatment. The recovery in patients with CIP is spontaneous but gradual. 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. 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.

REFERENCES