Progression of dystonia in complex regional pain syndrome

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A healthy woman aged 35 years underwent uneventful stripping of a varicose right saphenous vein. Severe right lower-leg pain and muscle spasms appeared immediately postoperatively. Reflex sympathetic dystrophy was diagnosed 7 weeks postoperatively. Electrophysiologic study 9 weeks postoperatively demonstrated unobtainable sural responses and gastrocnemius denervation on the right. Lumbosacral MRI revealed no abnormalities. Serial radiologic examinations documented progressive right-foot osteopenia. Her dystonia worsened and spread proximally, affecting her lumbosacral spine; tremor developed in the contralateral foot. These serial photographs (figure) illustrate progression of the dystonia that is increasingly recognized as part of complex regional pain syndrome (CRPS), particularly in patients with HLA-DR13 (see video clip 1 on the Neurology Web site). The case demonstrates that motor dysfunction in CRPS can begin immediately after the causative event, supporting other evidence that neither disuse nor psychological factors are primary causes.

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Neurology 2004;63;751
DOI 10.1212/01.WNL.0000130515.60724.02

This information is current as of August 23, 2004