Rapid emergence of temporal and pulvinar lesions in MELAS mimicking Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease

Hyperintense areas in the pulvinar in fluid-attenuated inversion recovery images and greater hyperintensity in cortical areas in DWI are typical of sporadic Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease (sCJD).1 A 59-year-old woman developed confusion, progressive aphasia, mutism, and fluctuations of vigilance within 2 weeks. MRI revealed abnormalities consistent with sCJD (figure). CSF showed normal cell counts, negative PCR for HSV, elevated lactate (4.6 mmol/L), and increased levels of 14-3-3 and tau protein (1,300 pg/L). There were no periodic sharp-wave complexes on EEG recordings. Magnetic resonance spectroscopy revealed a lactate signal indicative of mitochondriopathy2 and genetic analysis confirmed the MELAS A3243G mutation. Mitochondriopathies should be considered if otherwise typical features of sCJD rapidly emerge.

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Disclosure: Dr. Weiss has received funding for travel and speaker honoraria from Medtronic and Solvay Pharmaceuticals; and receives research support from Medtronic, Inc. and the University of Tübingen. Dr. Brockmann has received speaker honoraria from GlaxoSmithKline and Orion Corporation and funding for travel from GlaxoSmithKline, UCB, and the Movement Disorders Society. Dr. Nägele reports no disclosures. Dr. Gasser serves on the editorial boards of Parkinsonism and Related Disorders, Movement Disorders, and the Journal of Neurology; is author on a patent re: KASPP (LRRK2) gene, its production and use for the detection and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases; serves as a consultant for Cephalon, Inc. and Merck Serono, Schwarz Pharma, Boehringer Ingelheim, and Valeant Pharmaceuticals International; and receives research support from Novartis, German Research Ministry (BMBF), Helmholtz Association (HelMA), and the European Union. Dr. Krüger has received funding for travel and speaker honoraria from UCB, Cephalon, Inc., Abbott, Takeda Pharmaceutical Company Limited, Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd., and Medtronic, Inc.; serves as Associate Editor for the European Journal of Clinical Investigations, the Journal of Neural Transmission, and BMC Neurology; and receives research support from the German Research Council (DFG) and the Federal Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF).

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Figure MRI and spectroscopy

(A) The diffusion-weighted image displays bitemporal neocortical hyperintense signals. (B) The fluid-attenuated inversion recovery image 2 days after the initial MRI scan reveals newly emerging symmetric lesions in the pulvinar thalami. (C) Magnetic resonance spectroscopy displays a strong lactate signal.
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Neurology 2011;77:914
DOI 10.1212/WNL.0b013e31822c6275

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