Teaching NeuroImage: Neurovascular Consequences of Autonomic Dysreflexia

Author(s):
Christina M Lineback, MD; Eric W Moffet, MD; Minjee Kim, MD

Corresponding Author:
Christina M Lineback
christina.lineback@northwestern.edu

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Affiliation Information for All Authors: 1. Department of Neurology, Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine, Chicago, IL

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Christina M Lineback: Drafting/revision of the manuscript for content, including medical writing for content; Major role in the acquisition of data
Eric W Moffet: Drafting/revision of the manuscript for content, including medical writing for content
Minjee Kim: Drafting/revision of the manuscript for content, including medical writing for content

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An 18-year-old man with C6 quadriparesis presented with two 30-minute episodes of thunderclap headache, vision loss, new urinary incontinence, hypertension (200s/90s), and bradycardia over 24 hours. Imaging demonstrated multifocal cerebrovascular narrowing (Figure 1), restricted diffusion and hyperintense T2/FLAIR signal (Figure 2); transcranial dopplers (TCDs) displayed increased velocities. Reversible cerebral vasoconstriction syndrome (RCVS) was diagnosed.

Neurogenic bladder perhaps triggered autonomic dysreflexia (AD) and thus RCVS. Injury above T6 spinal cord eliminates supraspinal modulation, and can result in AD, defined as episodic hypertension and bradycardia initiated by unrestrained sympathetic reflexes.\textsuperscript{1,2} After suprapubic catheter placement, episodes ceased, TCD velocities normalized, and vision returned.
References


Figure 1:
Figure 2: MRI brain images illustrate evolution of the patient’s clinical course. Panels A and B were obtained upon admission; Diffusion weighted imaging (DWI) (A) and apparent diffusion coefficient (ADC) map (B) demonstrated a left parieto-occipital lobe acute infarct. Panels C and D were completed upon acute worsening of headache and vision loss, with DWI (C) and ADC map (D) showing additional ischemic infarcts.