Anterior Thalamic Infarction as Initial Manifestation of a Right Atrial Lipoma

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Cardiac tumors are an infrequent source of embolism to the brain in young adults. Myxomas are the most common among them and they are mainly located in the left atrium. Cardiac lipomas are a very rare benign neoplasm of the heart usually located in the right atrium. Its etiological relationship with stroke is not well established. We describe the case of a thalamic stroke probably caused by paradoxical embolism from a right atrial lipoma through a patent foramen ovale.

CASE REPORT

A 46-year-old male with mild hypertension, presented with speech and behavioral alterations first noticed on awakening without a previous Valsalva manoeuvre. On admission his blood pressure was 150/90 mm Hg, with a pulse of 70 beats/min and O₂ saturation of 97%. He was apyretic and cardiac and cervical auscultation was unremarkable. On neurologic examination, a non-fluent dysphasia with word finding difficulties, right facial paresis and a left Horner’s syndrome was observed. He also presented mild right hemiparesis and myoclonic-dystonic movements in lower limbs (NIHSS 7). Cervical and Transcranial Doppler (TCD) were normal. Cranial computerized tomography and closed respectively. The diagnosis of cardiac lipoma was established after pathological study (Figure 2 A-C). The patient was discharged from hospital with residual dysphasia and cognitive impairment consisting mainly of severe lack of initiative.

This case illustrates a typical clinical presentation of an anterior thalamic infarction combining a dysphasic and cognitive syndrome, a central Horner’s syndrome and myoclonic dystonia having a transitory affect not only the paretic limb but also the leg ipsilateral to the infarction. The vascular territory of the lesion suggests a cardiac source of embolism.

Lipomas are benign nonmyxomatous neoplasms of the heart that normally cause no symptoms and their diagnosis is often accidental. They represent 10% of the overall cardiac tumor masses arising from cardiac tissue and they are most frequently located in the right atrium. The relationship of cardiac lipomas with stroke is not well established, probably because of the rarity of this type of tumors. They have to be differentiated from lipomatous hypertrophy, usually localized in the atrial septum and sometimes associated with atrial septal defects and with stroke on a few occasions. The tumors arising from the right atrium present with constitutional symptoms, right heart failure, arrhythmias, syncope or ischemic heart symptoms. To our knowledge, stroke has been related to right atrial tumors only in three cases: in a primary cardiac lymphoma, in a cardiac hemangioma and in a myxoma.

In the case of our patient, it is also reasonable to assume that the source of the embolus that caused his stroke came from the right atrium through the PFO. Embolic tumor fragments are improbable because the lipoma was not easily breakable as it had a smooth surface and was encapsulated. Therefore, it is more plausible to consider that the abnormal motility of the right atrium owing to the dilatation caused by the lipoma, could favor the development of transient arrhythmias and/or a turbulent flow with the formation of thrombus that could
reach the brain through the PFO. The PFO was diagnosed first by TCD bubble study and then confirmed with TEE and it was not associated with a lipomatous hypertrophy of the interatrial septum. The possibility of a paradoxical embolism from an unrecognized peripheral venous thrombosis that lead to the incidental finding of the lipoma must also be considered although determining the pathological relevance of PFO for the stroke etiology in a particular patient is difficult when concurrent risk factors are present. Phlebography was not performed in this patient but the yield of this exploration to detect deep venous thrombosis in cases of suspected paradoxical embolism is very low.

This case report illustrates that stroke may be the first manifestation of a right atrial lipoma when it coexists with a PFO.

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REFERENCES