Basal Ganglia Herniation Into the Fourth Ventricle

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ABSTRACT: Background: Transtentorial herniation of large cerebral fragments is a rare phenomenon. Method: Case Study. Results: Examination of the brain of a 35-year-old male showed massive intracerebral hemorrhage resulting in displacement of basal ganglia components into the fourth ventricle. Conclusion: Sufficiently rapid intracerebral bleeding can dissect fragments of cerebrum and displace them long distances across the tentorial opening.


Uncal herniation is common consequence of an enlarging cerebral hemisphere due to tumor growth, brain swelling, or brain hemorrhage. Much less common, however, is transtentorial herniation of large fragments of brain. We present a patient who suffered basal ganglia and thalamic herniation into fourth ventricle following massive intracerebral hemorrhage.

CASE REPORT

A 35-year-old previously well male had apparently been involved in a fight three or four weeks prior to admission. After that he complained of headaches of increasing frequency and severity but did not see a physician. He awoke from sleep with a severe headache, stumbled around for several moments, and then collapsed. On examination at a rural hospital his pupils were equal and slightly reactive. His speech was garbled; he would open his eyes and move his right leg and arm to painful stimuli (Glasgow Coma Score 8). Blood pressure was 120/60 mmHg. He was given mannitol, dexamethasone, diazepam, and phenytoin. Over next two hours he became more alert. At 04:30 he suddenly lost consciousness and developed a fixed dilated left pupil (Glasgow Coma Score 3). He was transferred to our facility.

Cranial CT scan at 09:30 showed 7x7x4cm hematoma in the left frontotemporal region with extension into the lateral ventricles (Figure 1). There was marked subfalcine herniation, left uncal herniation, and midbrain distortion. The right lateral ventricle was dilated. The size of the tentorial opening was within normal limits. In the region of the fourth ventricle was a 2x3cm ovoid mass, the identity of which was unknown, surrounded by a narrow rim of blood (Figure 2). He died following organ donation, 36 hours after the initial presentation.

Examination of the brain after formalin fixation revealed diffuse brain swelling and bilateral uncal herniation. No berry aneurysms were found. There was no evidence of trauma or blood on the brain surface. Sectioning of the cerebrum revealed a large hematoma in the left frontotemporal region with extension into the lateral ventricles (Figure 1). There was marked subfalcine herniation, left uncal herniation, and midbrain distortion. The right lateral ventricle was dilated. The size of the tentorial opening was within normal limits. In the region of the fourth ventricle was a 2x3cm ovoid mass, the identity of which was unknown, surrounded by a narrow rim of blood (Figure 2). He died following organ donation, 36 hours after the initial presentation.

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DISCUSSION

Of interest in this case is the long distance displacement of a portion of basal ganglia and thalamus. We speculate that the hemorrhage began in the region of the external capsule or insula, dissecting the tissue away from the medial cerebral wall, rather than expanding within the gray matter in a manner more typical of hypertensive basal ganglia hemorrhages. Extremely rapid bleeding then drove the tissue into the posterior third ventricle, and forced it down through the tentorial notch. The CT scan demonstration of an ovoid mass in the fourth ventricle proves that this remarkable herniation event was not simply a consequence of prolonged brain swelling and distortion while the patient was awaiting organ donation.

The cause of the hemorrhage remains a mystery. Arteriolar thickening and tortuosity were identified in the frontal cortex. These changes are more often seen in aged patients and those with hypertension,

2 but there was no history or evidence of hypertension in this patient. The vague history of head injury with subsequent headaches leads to the consideration of “spät apoplexy”, late intracerebral hemorrhage which occurs following brain injury.

3,4 Almost all well documented cases of this phenomenon have occurred within a few days of relatively serious head injuries.

5 Nevertheless, a small traumatic intracerebral hematoma may have been present, traces of it being obliterated by the acute hematoma. In approximately 4% of intracerebral hemorrhage cases no cause can be identified; some of these may be due to small vascular malformations which destroy themselves during the hemorrhagic event.

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REFERENCES