Septic pulmonary and cerebral embolism caused by community-associated methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus in a healthy child

Septic pulmonary embolism (PE) is a rare disease in children, but the mortality rate is high. No cases of children with septic cerebral embolism (CE) were found in the literature. A previously healthy 13-year-old boy presented to a community hospital in 2007 complaining of headache, nausea, and intermittent fever for the past 3 days, and was treated empirically with amoxicillin. Three days later, he was transferred to our hospital with nuchal rigidity, severe vomiting, and drowsiness. A review of his history revealed that he had developed a carbuncle over his left thigh in the past week. A detailed clinical examination revealed a congested throat, nuchal rigidity, and coarse breathing. Brudzinski and Kernig signs were all negative. Initial laboratory investigations revealed a white blood cell count of 9.6 x 10^3/mm^3 (91.9% neutrophils), hemoglobin level of 13.5 g/dL, platelet count of 200,000/mm^3, and C-reactive protein level of 37.88 mg/dL. The cerebrospinal fluid analysis revealed a red blood cell count of 840/mm^3 and a white blood cell count of 1960/mm^3 (neutrophil 84%). Empiric antibiotics, vancomycin 750 mg i.v. q6h and ceftriaxone 2.0 g i.v. q12h, were used. The cerebrospinal fluid culture was negative. Two sets of blood cultures grew methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), which was susceptible to gentamicin, vancomycin, teicoplanin, trimethoprim-sulfamethoxazole, and ciprofloxacin, but resistant to oxacillin, penicillin, clindamycin, and erythromycin. The isolated strain carried the staphylococcal chromosomal cassette (SCC) mec VT gene, sequence type ST59, and the Panton–Valentine leukocidin (PVL) gene.

On the 4th day of treatment, a chest X-ray displayed patchy opacities over the right middle lobe and 1.6 cm nodular opacity over the lower left lung zone. Thoracic computed tomography revealed multiple nodules in both lungs associated with cavitary change. These findings strongly suggested septic PE (Fig. 1A). Brain magnetic resonance imaging was performed because the headache and nausea persisted. After contrast administration, areas of leptomeningeal enhancement along the sulci and fissures were observed on the left and bilateral cavernous sinuses, as well as two acute lacunar infarcts in the left frontal and anterior temporal white matter (Fig. 1B). The findings were suggestive of septic CE. After 4 weeks of vancomycin administration, the patient was administered oral antibiotics with rifampin and co-trimoxazole for 2 weeks. Recovery has remained uneventful to date.

Septic PE is an unusual nonthrombotic PE. We did not notice any common potential source or underlying condition that predisposed the patient to pediatric septic PE. The probable source of septic PE was a soft tissue infection. To our knowledge, no other case of concomitant septic PE, CE, and acute infarction has been reported to date. The most common pathogen of septic PE was S. aureus, and community-associated MRSA infections have increased markedly in the past decade in the United States, as well as in Taiwan. The community-associated MRSA isolate in our case carried the SCCmec VT and PVL genes. The SCCmec VT was first identified in Taiwan in 2004. The molecular community-associated MRSA isolates in Taiwan belonged to ST59 and carried SCCmec VT and PVL genes, and has been called the “Taiwan clone.” The strain has not spread from health care facilities, but has originated de novo in the community and has been found in several cases with invasive infection, including endocarditis and necrotizing pneumonia. Another brief report showed a 15-year-old boy with community-acquired osteomyelitis complicated by PE caused by PVL ST59 methicillin-susceptible S. aureus, strain KS1, which had PVL and peptide cytolysin (PSMs) with high expression levels, which may be related to invasive
infections and PE. Pediatricians should be aware that critically ill children with a skin or soft tissue infection, when associated with septic PE and CE, in an area with a high rate of MRSA, should be empirically treated with glycopeptides prior to susceptibility results being known.

Conflict of interest

All the authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgments

We thank Franklin D. Lowy at the Columbia University (New York, NY, USA) who provided a thoughtful review for this manuscript. This research received no specific grant from any funding agency, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

References


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4 December 2014
Available online 26 December 2014