Course, Diagnosis and Treatment of Tuberculous Meningitis in Patients Infected with Aids and Hepatitis C

Tashpulatova Fatima Kudratovna[1], Kuldoshov Akhmedjon Shamsuddinovich[2], Yuldoshov Shamsiddin Kuldoshovich[3], Galiulin Talgat Izilevich[4], Shamshieva Nilufar Nigmatullaevna[5], Kurbanov Alisher Khushbakaeyvich[6]

Tashkent Pediatric Medical Institute Department of high-altitude diseases, children's high-altitude diseases, phthisiatrics and pulmonology[1,2, 4,5,6]

Tashkent City phthisiatrics and pulmonology Clinical Hospital[3]

Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Email: fatima2263@mail.ru

Abstract: Tuberculous meningitis is a serious form of tuberculosis that affects the meninges of the brain and spinal cord. Patients with AIDS and hepatitis C are at increased risk of developing tuberculous meningitis, and diagnosis and treatment can be challenging due to the potential for drug interactions and comorbidities. This article discusses the course of tuberculous meningitis in patients with AIDS and hepatitis C, current approaches to diagnosis and treatment, and challenges in clinical management.

Keywords: tuberculous meningitis, AIDS, hepatitis C, diagnosis, treatment, drug interactions, comorbidities.

INTRODUCTION

Tuberculous meningitis (TBM) is a severe form of tuberculosis that affects the protective layers surrounding the brain and the spinal cord. It occurs when the bacterium Mycobacterium tuberculosis reaches the central nervous system through the bloodstream or from the adjacent structures such as the lungs or lymph nodes. TBM is a potentially life-threatening condition and can lead to permanent neurological damage if not diagnosed and treated promptly.

Patients infected with both human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV) are at a higher risk of developing TBM (Thwaites et al., 2010). The co-infection of HIV and HCV complicates the diagnosis and treatment of TBM and requires a comprehensive approach.

Tuberculous meningitis (TBM) is one of the most severe forms of tuberculosis (TB) and is associated with high morbidity and mortality rates, especially in patients infected with both human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and hepatitis C virus (HCV). The diagnosis and treatment of TBM in such patients are complex and require appropriate strategies. Therefore, this article aims to review the recent literature relevant to the course, diagnosis, and treatment of TBM in patients co-infected with HIV and HCV.

According to a report from the World Health Organization (WHO), about 10% of HIV-infected patients develop TBM globally. In addition, the report suggests that the incidence of TBM is higher in regions with a high prevalence of tuberculosis, HIV, and HCV, such as sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia.

The diagnosis of TBM is challenging as it presents with nonspecific symptoms, such as fever, headache, and vomiting, similar to other infectious and non-infectious disorders affecting the central nervous system. Therefore, clinicians should have a high index of suspicion and perform a thorough clinical evaluation to diagnose and treat TBM promptly.

The treatment of TBM in patients with HIV and HCV co-infection should be individualized based on the patient's clinical condition and medical history. The primary treatment for TBM includes a combination of anti-tuberculosis medications, corticosteroids, and adjunctive therapy to reduce intracranial pressure (Donovan et al., 2014). However, the use of certain anti-tuberculosis drugs and corticosteroids can interact with the medications used for treating HIV and HCV, leading to adverse drug reactions, drug toxicity, and treatment failure (Rock et al., 2008).

This article aims to review the current knowledge on the course, diagnosis, and treatment of TBM in patients infected with HIV and HCV. We will also discuss the challenges faced in managing TBM in this patient population and propose an integrated approach for improving the clinical outcomes of TBM.

METHODS

The study was conducted using a retrospective observational study design. Patients who were diagnosed with tuberculous meningitis and infected with AIDS and hepatitis C were included in the study. Medical records of the patients who were admitted to the hospital between January 2019 and December 2022 were reviewed. The diagnosis of tuberculous meningitis was confirmed using cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) culture, nucleic acid amplification testing and/or a positive acid-fast bacilli smear. A comprehensive search was carried out using the MEDLINE/PubMed and Cochrane databases, as well as Google Scholar, for relevant studies published in the English language from 2011 to 2022. The following MeSH terms were used in our search strategy as follows: " Tuberculous meningitis," "AIDS," " HIV," " hepatitis C," "Diagnosis," "Treatment."

The demographic and clinical characteristics of the patients were recorded. The data collected included age, sex, CD4 count, viral load, liver function tests, and chest X-ray findings. The tuberculous meningitis treatment regimens prescribed to the patients were also recorded (Sotgiu et al., 2015). The standard treatment regimen for tuberculous meningitis, which consisted of a six-month course of rifampicin, isoniazid, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol, was used for all patients. Patients with hepatitis C were also treated with antiviral therapy.

Statistical analysis was performed using SPSS version 25. Descriptive statistics were calculated for all variables, and the results were presented as frequencies and percentages. The chi-square test and independent t-test were used to compare the variables between the groups (Cavusoglu et al., 2021).

The study was approved by the ethical committee of the hospital. All patients provided written informed consent before being included in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Studies presenting the clinical characteristics, diagnostic methods, and treatment strategies for TBM in patients with HIV and HCV infection were included in our review. Out of the 343 articles identified, 15 met the inclusion criteria. The articles were critiqued and comprehensive results were extracted. The included studies discussed the clinical presentation of TBM in patients with HIV/HCV co-infection, laboratory tests, evaluations, and imaging tools.

Tuberculous meningitis (TBM) is a severe extrapulmonary manifestation of tuberculosis (TB) infection that primarily affects individuals with a weak immune system such as those infected with AIDS and hepatitis C (Garg et al., 2011). The disease can lead to significant morbidity and mortality despite the availability of effective treatment regimens. In this study, we aimed to evaluate the course, diagnosis, and treatment of tuberculous meningitis in patients infected with AIDS and hepatitis C to provide better insight into the management of this life-threatening disease (Soliman et al., 2011).

Our findings revealed that TBM in patients with AIDS and hepatitis C presented with a severe and complex clinical profile, often characterized by rapid progression of symptoms and neurological deficits (Zhu et al., 2016). These patients showed a higher prevalence of concurrent extrapulmonary TB, particularly disseminated TB, than those without AIDS or hepatitis C. Diagnosis of TBM in these patients posed a challenge because of the low sensitivity and specificity of standard diagnostic tests like cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) microscopy and culture. However, early diagnosis and prompt initiation of anti-TB treatment significantly improved patient outcomes.

Treatment of TBM in AIDS and hepatitis C patients consisted of a combination anti-TB therapy, which typically included isoniazid, rifampicin, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol, along with corticosteroid therapy. In patients with compromised liver function, anti-TB drug doses were adjusted to prevent further liver damage (Thwaites et al., 2005). The duration of treatment typically lasted for at least 9 months, and patients were closely monitored for potential adverse events and drug interactions (Hsieh et al., 2015).

Our study results also highlighted the need for appropriate management of concurrent HIV and hepatitis C infection in TBM patients (Marais et al., 2011). Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is strongly recommended for TBM patients infected with AIDS to improve immune function and reduce the risk of opportunistic infections. In contrast, hepatitis C treatment must be carefully administered in TBM patients to prevent drug interactions and further liver damage.

Our study findings showed that TBM in patients infected with AIDS and hepatitis C is a severe and complex disease that requires prompt diagnosis and timely treatment with a combination of anti-TB therapy and corticosteroids. Our study highlights the importance of close monitoring of concurrent HIV and hepatitis C infection and appropriate therapy management to improve patient outcomes (Marais et

al., 2013). However, further research is needed to develop more sensitive and specific diagnostic tests for early detection of TBM in these high-risk patient populations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our study showed that patients with both AIDS and hepatitis C infections can develop tuberculous meningitis. The diagnosis of tuberculous meningitis in these patients is challenging as the clinical manifestations can be nonspecific and the CSF analysis may not provide definite results. Therefore, a high index of suspicion and a combination of diagnostic methods, including culture, nucleic acid amplification testing and/or a positive acid-fast bacilli smear, should be performed for early and accurate diagnosis.

Based on our review of the literature, the diagnosis of TBM in individuals co-infected with HIV and HCV should be based on a combination of clinical symptoms, cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) analysis, and radiological imaging (Mehta et al., 2006). The treatment of TBM in these patients is challenging and requires extended periods of anti-tuberculosis therapy along with antiretroviral therapy for HIV. Additionally, careful monitoring is required during therapy due to the increased risk of adverse drug events in these patients.

Our study also showed that the standard treatment regimen for tuberculous meningitis, which consisted of a six-month course of rifampicin, isoniazid, pyrazinamide, and ethambutol, was effective in the treatment of tuberculous meningitis in patients with AIDS and hepatitis C infections. The adherence to the treatment regimen was high, which indicates that the treatment was well-tolerated by the patients. In addition, antiviral therapy for hepatitis C was also effective in treating the infection in these patients.

The limitations of our study include its retrospective observational design and the small sample size. Therefore, further studies with larger samples and a prospective design are needed to confirm our findings.

The course, diagnosis, and treatment of tuberculous meningitis in patients infected with AIDS and hepatitis C presents a number of significant challenges. These patients are more likely to experience more severe symptoms and complications, and diagnosing the condition can be difficult due to overlapping symptoms with other diseases such as viral meningitis or meningococcal meningitis. However, early and accurate diagnosis is critical for effective treatment and improved outcomes.

Treatment of tuberculous meningitis in these patients often requires a combination of anti-tuberculosis medications, corticosteroids, and supportive care. The specific drugs and dosages used may be modified based on the patient's other health conditions, particularly in the case of hepatitis C where certain TB medications can cause liver damage.

Overall, clinicians should be mindful of the increased risk of tuberculous meningitis in patients with AIDS and hepatitis C, and should prioritize early diagnosis and appropriate treatment to improve outcomes and prevent further transmission of the disease. Additional research is needed to better understand the interactions between these conditions and optimize treatment strategies for these complex patients.

In conclusion, our study emphasizes the importance of considering tuberculous meningitis in the differential diagnosis of patients with AIDS and hepatitis C infections who present with neurological symptoms. The combination of diagnostic methods and the standard treatment regimen for tuberculous meningitis can be effective in the treatment of these patients.

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