Optic perineuritis as an initial presentation of ocular toxoplasmosis: a case report

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Dear Editor,

Ocular toxoplasmosis, caused by Toxoplasma gondii infection, is one of the most common causes of posterior uveitis worldwide[1]. It typically manifests as white focal retinitis with overlying vitreous inflammation that results in a chorioretinal scar and associated scotoma[2]. However, the diagnosis of ocular toxoplasmosis can be challenging when it presents as an isolated papillitis without other typical signs of retinochoroiditis or vitritis[2]. Although optic nerve involvement in ocular toxoplasmosis was present in 5.3% of cases, isolated papillitis was extremely rare (3 eyes out of 926 patients) and was only considered a presumed diagnosis in such cases given the presence of old toxoplasmic retinochoroiditis lesions[3]. Few reports have described optic nerve involvement preceding toxoplasmic retinochoroiditis, while perineuritis, an uncommon form of orbital inflammatory disease involving the optic nerve sheath, has not been reported at all[4-5]. Herein, we describe a case of ocular toxoplasmosis that initially presented with optic perineuritis followed by typical retinochoroidal inflammation. To our knowledge, this is the first case report of ocular toxoplasmosis with perineuritis in an immunocompetent individual.

Ethical Approval The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was waived by the Institutional Review Board of Ajou University Hospital, Suwon, Korea (AJOUIRB-EX-2022-450).

Case Report A 56-year-old woman presented with a 1-day history of ocular pain and sudden diminution of the superior visual field in the left eye. Her corrected visual acuity was 20/20 in both eyes with a myopic correction of -2.50 diopters in the left eye. She had an unremarkable slit-lamp examination, pupils reactive to light with no relative afferent pupillary defect, and normal color vision in both eyes. Fundus examination revealed swelling and hemorrhage in the inferior sector of the left optic disc (Figure 1A) that correlated with a superior arcuate visual field defect (Figure 1B). Slit-lamp and fundus examination of the right eye were unremarkable. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) of the brain and orbits revealed wall thickening and enhanced signal intensity along the left optic nerve sheath that was suggestive of optic perineuritis (Figure 1C). The majority of the laboratory workups, which included negative serologies for viral markers, anti-aquaporin 4 antibody, and anti-myelin oligodendrocyte glycoprotein antibody, were noncontributory. The rapid plasma reagin test for syphilis and the polymerase chain reaction test for COVID-19 were also negative. The patient was started on a 3-day course of intravenous methylprednisolone (1 g/d) and experienced prompt resolution of the ocular pain; however, she did not show any improvement in the visual field defect, even after completing the steroid treatment.

A month after the initial presentation, she complained of worsening of vision and aggravated visual field defects in her left eye. The corrected visual acuity of the left eye deteriorated to 20/100. Slit-lamp examination revealed fine keratic precipitates and 2+ cells in the anterior chamber. A white focal retinal exudate with hemorrhage was noted in the inferior juxtapapillary area adjacent to the previous peripapillary lesion, and there was extension of the whitish retinal edema inferior to the fovea (Figure 2A). Fluorescein angiography showed blocked fluorescence at the retinitis lesion and delayed filling of the retinal arteries (Figure 2B). Optical coherence tomography (OCT) revealed an inner retinal edema with vitreal inflammation (Figure 2C). With the suspicion of ocular toxoplasmosis and combined branch retinal artery occlusion (BRAO), extensive laboratory workup was performed, which revealed positive serological results for anti-toxoplasma immunoglobulin (Ig)M and IgG and unremarkable findings in the other tests.

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The patient was started on anti-toxoplasmic antibiotics (sulfamethoxazole/trimethoprim and clindamycin) and oral prednisone. The retinal exudates and retinal edema started to improve a week after the initiation of anti-toxoplasmic medication, and the patient was able to complete a 6-week course of steroid tapering. At 5mo follow-up, the corrected visual acuity in the left eye was restored to 20/40. There was no recurrence but a white focal retinochoroidal scar on fundoscopy (Figure 3A) and inner retinal thinning at the previous BRAO lesion on OCT (Figure 3B) were noted.

Atypical presentations of ocular toxoplasmosis have been reported in the literature, such as optic neuropathy, neovascularization, retinal vascular occlusion, epiretinal membranes, and retinal detachment. Moreover, BRAO has been reported to occur in 7% of ocular toxoplasmosis cases at the site of an active chorioretinitis lesion overlying or adjacent to the retinal vessels due to the direct compression of the artery by the inflammatory focus, vasoconstriction, and increased blood viscosity. The low prevalence of optic nerve involvement in ocular toxoplasmosis, such as pure papillitis without concomitant chorioretinal inflammation, contributes to diagnostic challenges. As summarized in Table 1, a few cases presenting with optic nerve lesions were diagnosed later as ocular toxoplasmosis based on subsequent typical retinochoroidal inflammation several weeks after optic nerve...
Optic perineuritis, an uncommon inflammatory disorder, is generally considered an orbital inflammation[13-14]. MRI of the orbits may demonstrate circumferential enhancement along the optic nerve, occasionally accompanied by intraorbital inflammation[13]. Patients with perineuritis may complain of visual field defects with intact central vision[13]. A case of toxoplasmosis involving the optic nerve and orbital tissue has been reported as the initial manifestation of undiagnosed HIV infection[11], while ours was a case of perineuritis in an immunocompetent individual. A positive toxoplasmosis serology can provide additional clues for diagnosis in cases of isolated optic nerve involvement[12]. Serum anti-toxoplasma IgM levels can increase, and its titer can rise within 1-2wk of infection and become undetectable after 6-9mo[1].

In summary, we report the first case of optic perineuritis that is thought to be attributed to ocular toxoplasmosis, given the subsequent typical retinochoroidal inflammation and complicated BRAO. Anti-toxoplastic serology tests can be helpful, especially in cases with atypical presentations including optic perineuritis.

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REFERENCES

Optic perineuritis in toxoplasmosis


