CASE REPORT

Rare Coexistence of Myasthenia Gravis and Lambert-Eaton Myasthenic Syndrome with Adenocarcinoma of the Bladder: Case Report

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INTRODUCTION

Myasthenia gravis (MG) is a post-synaptic disorder, and Lambert-Eaton myasthenic syndrome (LEMS) is a pre-synaptic disorder; both are well-known autoimmune neuromuscular junction disorders (1). LEMS is also a rare but well-known paraneoplastic disorder and is an autoimmune disorder that affects the neuromuscular junction. In 1956, Lambert and colleagues first reported six patients with atypical myasthenia and lung carcinoma. These patients had a specific response to repetitive nerve stimulation (RNS) that differed from the responses of patients with MG (2). Wirtz et al. reported a prevalence rate of 2.3 per million (annual incidence, 0.5 per million) for LEMS (3). In their study, this incidence rate was 1.4 times lower than MG. The mean age of these patients was 58 years. The syndrome is known to relate to a variety of malignancies, especially small-cell carcinoma of the lung. Rare case reports in the literature reported the relationship between LEMS and bladder and ureter cancers, especially transitional cell carcinoma of the bladder (4). Considering the underlying cause of the condition, it has a very poor prognosis (4). Coexistence of both MG and LEMS is very rare. Here, we report the case of an 82-year-old man with these coexisting conditions.

CASE PRESENTATION

The patient was an 82-year-old Jewish man with a history of adenocarcinoma of the bladder since about 11 months before admission to our center. He received several rounds of chemotherapy. He was referred to the neurology clinic because of dysphagia, ptosis in the left eye, weakness in both lower extremities, autonomic dysfunction. Coexistence of MG and LEMS was diagnosed according to clinical and para-clinical evaluations. Coexistence of MG and LEMS is very rare, but this presentation in a patient with a history of adenocarcinoma of the bladder has not been previously reported. We emphasize the importance of carefully evaluating patients with LEMS for any underlying malignancy.
reflexes were significantly decreased. Sensory examinations (light touch, pinprick) were normal, and Babinski’s signs were down-going bilaterally.

In laboratory tests, only a minimal elevation was observed in blood urea nitrogen (35 mg/dl) and creatinine (2.1 mg/dl); other lab results were within normal ranges. Serum titer of antibodies against AChRs was significantly elevated (7.8 nmol/L; normal level, <0.1 nmol/L).

Brain magnetic resonance imaging showed meningioma in the frontal lobe. Chest computed tomography did not show any sign of malignancy in the lung and was negative for thymoma. The edrophonium test (Tensilon test) showed significant clinical improvement of the left-eye ptosis. Electromyography and nerve conduction studies were normal. RNS with high frequency stimulation (30 Hz) showed a significant increase (400%) in increment in two samples. The patient’s symptoms gradually improved after treatment with both prednisolone (20 mg per day) and pyridostigmine (240 mg per day). Considering the patient’s history, physical examination, and para-clinical evaluations, coexisting MG and LEMS was diagnosed.

DISCUSSION

Typical patients with LEMS have a triad of proximal muscle weaknesses, areflexia, and autonomic dysfunction (4). RNS shows greater-than-100% incremental changes on high-rate stimulation. In most cases, a para-neoplastic origin from small-cell carcinoma of the lung is present (4,5). Conversely, oculobulbar symptoms, elevated anti-AChR antibody titers, and a positive edrophonium test are typical presentations of MG (5). The patient we report here had a unique profile. Oculobulbar symptoms, elevated anti-AChR antibody titers, a positive edrophonium test, and significant response to treatment favored a diagnosis of MG.

However, presence of areflexia, abnormal electrophysiological findings, and underlying malignancy favored a diagnosis of LEMS. Considering these facts, the coexistence in our patient of MG and LEMS, although very rare, was possible. In 1987, Oh et al. first identified what they termed overlap myasthenic syndrome (6). They used this term to describe a patient with combined MG and LEMS (6). In 1988, Taphoorn et al. reported another patient with coexistence of both diseases (7).

In 2012, Kim et al. reported the case of a 48-year-old woman with combined MG and LEMS, which was diagnosed according to her clinical and electrophysiological features. Their patient had a significant response to treatment with anticholinesterase inhibitors and steroids, as did our patient (8). Our patient, however, had one other rare condition: adenocarcinoma of the bladder. LEMS is thought to have a paraneoplastic origin from small-cell carcinoma of the lung. Some rare case reports have chronicled the relationship between this condition and malignancies in the bladder, especially transitional cell carcinoma (4). Coexistence of MG and LEMS is very rare, but this presentation in our patient, who had a history of adenocarcinoma of the bladder, has not been previously reported.

CONCLUSION

Patients with LEMS should be evaluated very carefully for underlying malignancies. In most cases, the underlying malignancy is in the lung, but an extra-pulmonary origin, such as in the urinary system, is possible. Moreover, in cases of overlap syndrome, treatment of MG may improve the general condition of the patient.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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REFERENCES