Sentinel Node Biopsy and Lumpectomy in a Patient with Machado–Joseph Disease

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1. Introduction

Spinocerebellar ataxia 3 (SCA3), also known as Machado–Joseph disease (MJD) is an autosomal dominant, progressive neurodegenerative disorder. Patients present with cerebellar ataxia, dystonia, rigidity, and neuropathy that worsen with time. On a molecular level, it occurs due to a CAG trinucleotide repeat expansion in the \textit{ATXN3} gene. Due to the risk of pulmonary aspiration, hypoventilation, autonomic and thermoregulatory dysfunction, vocal cord paralysis, progressive paraplegia, parkinsonian symptoms, and chronic pain, it has significant anesthesia implications [1]. There are three case reports in the literature describing regional anesthetic management of patients with SCA3, but none that describe general anesthesia specifically with MJD. We therefore describe a case of a patient with SCA3 who successfully underwent general anesthesia and considerations for perioperative management of this patient population.

2. Case Presentation

A 48-year-old female with breast cancer presented for right breast lumpectomy and axillary node dissection at an outpatient surgical center. She had the presumptive diagnosis of Machado–Joseph disease (MJD). She related an extensive family history of MJD in her maternal grandmother, maternal aunt, mother, two younger sisters, and her oldest daughter. Many of her family members passed away from complications of the disease. She recalled prior MRI and lumbar puncture but denied any genetic testing. Her other past medical history included hypertension, irritable bowel syndrome, and urinary incontinence. Her family history included several other relatives with this condition including her mother who passed away from issues related to the syndrome at 44 years old. Her preoperative laboratory studies and airway exam were unremarkable. Preoperative electrocardiogram (ECG) showed sinus rhythm with an incomplete left bundle branch block. Preoperative echocardiogram showed an ejection fraction of 60–65%, moderately dilated right ventricle with normal function, moderately dilated right atrium, moderate tricuspid valve regurgitation and right ventricular systolic pressure of 32 mmHg (millimeters of mercury) consistent with mild pulmonary hypertension. She was on tizanidine, a muscle relaxant for spasticity. A preoperative Neurology note indicated that the patient's MJD was “fairly advanced and she is currently not ambulatory” and while patient is not having “considerable
She was successfully discharged home a/f after 1.5 hours. She was brought back to the OR and standard ASA (American Society of Anesthesiologists) monitors were placed. The decision was made to place an LMA (Laryngeal Mask Airway) so neuromuscular blocking agents could be avoided. The patient was in the operating room for 1.5 hours. At the end of the case, the LMA was removed and patient was taken to the post-anesthesia care unit (PACU) on room air. She recovered uneventfully in the PACU and did not require any opioids. She was successfully discharged home after 1.5 hours.

3. Discussion

Spinocerebellar ataxias (SCAs) are a group of rare, hereditary, and progressive neurodegenerative disorders characterized by worsening cerebellar dysfunction—typically in the setting of many other neurological symptoms. Of the more than 30 subtypes of SCAs, Machado–Joseph Disease (MJD) or spinocerebellar ataxia type 3 (SCA3) is the most common form of SCA worldwide [5]. It is caused by an autosomal dominant CAG trinucleotide repeat expansion in the ATXN3 gene. This results in the mutant ataxin 3 protein, which was previously a cytoplasmic protein, forming nuclear inclusions and causing cellular degeneration [6].

MJD is a multifocal neurodegenerative disorder that preferentially affects the cerebellum, pyramidal tracts, extrapyramidal tracts, motor neurons, and the oculomotor system. The common clinical presentation includes worsening cerebellar ataxia and an upper motor neuron syndrome including spasticity, hyperreflexia, and difficulty with fine motor skills [7]. However, this usually occurs with many other symptoms spanning from extrapyramidal signs to peripheral nerve dysfunction. In addition, onset of symptoms can occur anywhere from ages 10 to 70 with widely varying rates of progression [8]. Despite the phenotypic variability of MJD, there are many minor features that are typical for the disease including exophthalmos, progressive external ophthalmoplegia, facial and lingual fasciculations, and dystonia [7]. Like other SCAs, management of MJD is largely supportive and aimed at controlling symptoms of spasticity, Parkinsonism, dystonia, and myalgia; there are no effective treatments available for MJD.

Many disorders of the central nervous system can be considered relative contraindications to anesthesia due to the risk of exacerbating preexisting neurologic deficits. These risks are often difficult to stratify due to disease heterogeneity and the absence of robust literature surrounding the topic. With respect to MJD, there are only three case reports that describe regional anesthetic management and no case reports discussing general anesthesia [2]. Patients with MJD have numerous clinical features with important implications for anesthesia. Dysphagia and vocal cord paralysis due to bulbar dysfunction predisposes MJD patients to aspiration, hypoxia, and delayed postoperative recovery of cough and gag reflexes. In fact, aspiration pneumonia is the most common cause of death in SCA patients [9]. This is exacerbated by peripheral denervation, which can cause respiratory muscle weakness [10]. As a result, regional anesthesia is preferred to general anesthesia due to the higher risks for aspiration and hypoxia in the latter. Moreover, there are numerous case reports supporting the safety of regional anesthesia for SCA including MJD [2, 3]. There is a theoretical risk for postoperative neuropathy when administering regional anesthesia, especially in patients with preexisting peripheral neuropathy, but this has not been reported in SCA [11]. In this instance, the patient refused regional anesthesia and local infiltration analgesia alone was inappropriate for the surgery. However, she did not have preexisting bulbar palsy, so general anesthesia was chosen despite the risks.

Similar respiratory concerns inform the avoidance of opiates to minimize risk of delayed hypoventilation. This
emphasizes the selection of regional anesthesia including peripheral nerve blocks and neuraxial anesthesia when possible; this can be reinforced with multimodal nonopioid analgesia such as acetaminophen, celecoxib, and gabapentin. Our patient was given 1000 mg of oral acetaminophen and generous local infiltration analgesia and did not require postoperative opiates.

Dysautonomia can cause unpredictable and potentially life-threatening responses to general and neuraxial anesthesia including circulatory collapse after initiation of mechanical ventilation [12]. This supports stricter control over intravascular volume, blood pressure, and heart rate with fluids, vasopressors, and anticholinergics. An arterial line can be considered in longer cases for more accurate hemodynamic monitoring. Our patient was preemptively given a generous amount of intravenous fluids; she required frequent doses of phenylephrine and a single dose of glycopyrrolate to avoid hypotension and bradycardia.

Patients with MJD may be sensitive to medications that can alter neural physiology. Unfortunately, due to scant literature, guidelines must be extrapolated from case reports on patients with similar disorders. For instance, patients with Huntington's chorea—another inherited neurodegenerative disorder due to CAG repeats—can have exaggerated responses to barbiturates resulting in prolonged apnea and recovery time in patients. This may advise avoidance of premedication with barbiturates in patients with MJD [13]. Similarly, circulatory collapse after administration of succinylcholine has been reported in patients with diffuse lower motor neuron disease [14]. This may suggest avoiding depolarizing and nondepolarizing muscle relaxants in patients with MJD to minimize risk of protracted neuromuscular paralysis. We opted to use a laryngeal mask airway (LMA) in our patient to avoid the use of muscle relaxants. This may increase the risk of aspiration, but our patient did not have dysphagia, and there have been reports of using LMAs in SCA patients without airway complications [15].

Volatile anesthetics such as halothane and enfurane have been reported to alter cerebellar cGMP and subsequently affect motor activity in mice [16]. Volatile agents can also induce aberrant calcium release from the endoplasmic reticulum and cause neural cell damage; alterations in calcium homeostasis and calcium release from the endoplasmic reticulum and anticholinergics have been implicated in the pathogenesis of SCA [17]. Further, there is a case report describing refractory head tremor after volatile anesthesia in a patient with SCA6 [18]. Therefore, volatile anesthetics should be used carefully in patients with MJD. We used propofol for both induction and maintenance anesthesia in our patient to avoid using volatile anesthetics.

Anti-dopaminergic medications can potentially induce or exacerbate extrapyramidal symptoms including dyskinesia and dystonia in patients with MJD [19]. This cautions against using medications such as procyclidine to treat postoperative nausea and vomiting. In our patient who had preexisting dystonia, we gave intraoperative dexamethasone and ondansetron as prophylaxis against postoperative nausea and vomiting.

MJD patients can often have emotional instability, cognitive dysfunction, and dysarthria, which can cause communication problems [20]. Additionally, patients with MJD often have myodystonia and involuntary movements, which can prevent proper positioning for procedures. Neuraxial and general anesthesia can alleviate spasticity in these patients, which allows for easier positioning.

4. Conclusion
In conclusion, we successfully administered general anesthesia to a patient with Machado–Joseph Disease. Certain patients with this disease process may potentially undergo general anesthesia safely.

Ethical Approval
Consent was obtained by all participants in this study.

Conflicts of Interest
In compliance with the ICMJE uniform disclosure form, all authors declare the following: Payment/services info: All authors declare the following: no financial support was received from any organization for the submitted work.

Authors’ Contributions
Conception and design of article: all authors. Drafting of manuscript: all authors. Editing: AE, NA.

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