Postnatal encephaloclastic porencephaly—a new lesion?

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Abstract

A previously unrecognised and distinctive pattern of severe brain injury in extreme preterm neonates was observed recently. Fifteen neonates of birth weight 600–1270 g and gestation of 24–32 weeks showed relatively late development on cerebral ultrasound scan of extensive dense and cystic lesions involving the periphery of the brain. The extent of the changes was confirmed at postmortem examination in 11 babies. These changes have been called encephaloclastic porencephaly. The population of babies in whom this has occurred and their clinical outcome has been reviewed, with comparison between the evolution of the ultrasound changes and pathological findings at postmortem examination.

The susceptibility of the brain in the sick premature infant to insult is well recognised, with important consequent morbidity and mortality. Improved techniques in brain ultrasonography have led to early recognition of brain injury, and in particular certain patterns of injury have been well defined in the literature over recent years. In the patient who suffers cerebral ischaemia periventricular leucomalacia is characteristic, but in the mature infant subcortical leucomalacia is more typical. Current evidence suggests that the site of the lesion is determined by the development and maturation of the cerebral arterial blood supply.

Recently we have observed a new pattern of injury in a series of 15 preterm neonates at Birmingham Maternity Hospital. In these infants we observed the relatively late development of extensive echodense and cystic lesions involving the periphery of the cerebrum. The pattern seen on ultrasonography and confirmed at postmortem examination in two thirds of cases has not previously been reported in liveborn infants, although pathologically it has similarities with the lesion of hydranencephaly in the fetus.

The population of neonates is reviewed and the evolution of ultrasound changes and correlation with pathological findings described.

Subjects and methods

The neonatal intensive care unit at Birmingham Maternity Hospital is the regional referral unit for the West Midlands. All neonates admitted to intensive care undergo cerebral ultrasound scanning twice a week and later once a week when the infant is clinically stable. The majority of scans were performed by one experienced observer (PRP). A Hewlett Packard ultrasound imaging system with a 5 mHz phased focused array transducer was used. The anterior fontanelle was used as an acoustic window. The method used and our experience at this unit has been reported previously.

During the study period September 1988 to April 1990, 265 babies of birth weight <1500 g were admitted to our unit. In 15 neonates a new pattern of brain injury was noted. Clinical data were drawn for these 15 neonates from contemporary case notes and the evolution of ultrasound scan appearances analysed.

A postmortem examination was performed by the regional perinatal pathologist (DIR) in 11 of the 14 babies that have died.

Results

(1) CLINICAL DETAILS AND OUTCOME

Clinical details of the neonates under discussion are outlined in table 1. All were sick preterm neonates.
neonates whose clinical histories bore all the markers of neonatal intensive care. They were of mean gestation 27 weeks (range 24–32 weeks) and mean birth weight 940 g (range 600–1270 g). Fourteen required ventilation from birth for a mean duration of 15 days. Seven required colloid for the treatment of mean blood pressure <30 mm Hg in the first 24 hours of life but none required inotropic agents. All underwent arterial cannulation. Eleven had a patent ductus arteriosus, seven received indomethacin, and one required surgery.

Outcome was extremely poor with 14 of the 15 neonates dying. All were profoundly abnormal neurologically before they died and eight required treatment for frank convulsions. The one survivor has severe neurological deficit at 12 months.

(2) ULTRASOUND SCAN APPEARANCES
The cerebral ultrasound appearances were characterised by irregular echodense areas extending from the ventricles to the skull margin. They were bilateral, typically affecting the parietal lobes and sparing the medial parts of the hemisphere bordering the longitudinal fissure. Peripherally there were finger-like projections, which represent deep echodense sulci, and these together with the medial sparing give a striking characteristic appearance on posterior coronal sections (fig 1).

This appearance was followed by gross cystic changes (fig 2) and sometimes shrinkage of the brain (fig 3). In three cases where evolution of these lesions was observed most closely the earliest changes were cortical wedge shaped densities (fig 4) that progressed rapidly to the...
Postnatal encephaloclastic porencephaly—a new lesion?

Typical mixed cystic and dense lesions. The time of appearance of these changes is shown in fig 5. Other ultrasound abnormalities were present in five babies, namely subependymal haemorrhages alone in three (numbers 4, 9, and 15), a subependymal haemorrhage and periventricular leucomalacia in one (number 7), and a subependymal haemorrhage, intraventricular haemorrhage, and periventricular leucomalacia in another (number 11). In all these five babies these scan appearances were well established and stable at the time when new lesions appeared.

(3) PATHOLOGY (SEE TABLE 2)

The characteristic lesion in the majority of these babies was full thickness necrosis of the cerebral cortex and underlying white matter resulting in communication of the ventricular system with the subarachnoid space (fig 6), which we have termed encephaloclastic porencephaly after the convention of Yakovlev and Wadsworth. Typically the area around the sulcus centralis, sulcus lateralis and insula were involved, although in the more extensive lesions the frontal, parietal, and occipital lobes were affected with relative sparing of the medial surfaces (fig 7). The extent of the lesions varied from relatively narrow clefts to very extensive loss of the superolateral portions of the cerebral hemispheres. In the majority of cases subarachnoid and/or cortical haemorrhages overlay the necrotic lesions (fig 8). Mature lesions typically showed rounded edges to the cortical defects (fig 9) with ragged linings to the deeper surfaces. Microscopy revealed a phagocytic and glial reaction that in many instances was more extensive and

![Figure 7](image1.png) Case 4: cerebral hemispheres viewed from the lateral surfaces. End stage lesions with massive destruction of the cortex and cerebral white matter with preservation of the medial surfaces can be seen.

![Figure 8](image2.png) Case 5: lateral surfaces of the cerebral hemispheres. Subarachnoid haemorrhages overlaying necrotic lesions have led to collapse of the hemispheres (arrowed).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infant No</th>
<th>Subarachnoid or cortical haemorrhage</th>
<th>Cortical necrosis</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Other lesions</th>
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PVL = periventricular leucomalacia.
advanced at the peripheral part of the lesion consistent with a centripetal evolution. The earlier lesions were associated with small subarachnoid haemorrhages and perivascular haemorrhages in the underlying cortex with a radial distribution. The pathology will be described in more detail elsewhere.

Discussion

During the 20 month period from September 1988–August 1990 at the Birmingham Maternity Hospital there were 15 neonates who showed a different pattern of severe brain injury to that previously described. Characteristically, these changes appeared late in the neonatal course. They were extensive, bilateral, and involved the periphery of the brain. Pathological findings confirmed ultrasound appearances, with full thickness necrosis of cerebral cortex and white matter. These findings are not in keeping with the classic pattern of brain injury in preterm infants of birth weight <1500 g requiring intensive care, and there is no new procedure or technique that has been used. The presence of extensive necrosis is strongly suggestive of ischaemic injury, although the peripheral lesions are hard to explain in the context of our current understanding of ischaemic injury in the preterm brain. It is possible that with improved techniques and understanding of neonatal intesitive care and the subsequent protracted survival of these neonates, early pathological changes not previously detectable on ultrasound scan are now becoming apparent at a later date. In this series of babies no insult to the brain has been identified and it is not possible to time the exact onset of the lesions. It seems probable that they represent the effects of an as yet unidentified postnatal event.

Postnatal encephaloclastic porencephaly carries an extremely poor prognosis. All but one of our infants died and before death eight had evidence of neurological abnormality requiring treatment for frank seizures. The only survivor had severe neurological deficit at follow up at 12 months.

In conclusion we report a new distinctive pattern of preterm brain injury, encephaloclastic porencephaly. Regular cerebral ultrasound scanning enables early recognition, with good correlation with pathological data.

10 Paneth M, Radelli R, Monte W, et al. White matter necrosis in very low birth weight infants: neuropathologic and
ultrasonographic findings in infants surviving six days or longer. J Pediatr 1990;116:975-84.

Meningococcal disease and the flu
The meningococcus is usually a peaceable organism sitting quietly in the nasopharynx and seemingly bearing no grudge. Why then does it become so malign all of a sudden? Variations in virulence may provide some explanation and clearly there are host and environmental factors involved in the propensity for young children. It has been suggested for a long time that upper respiratory virus infections might predispose to meningococcal disease by either facilitating the entry of the bacterium into the tissues and then into the blood or immune suppression.

In the last month of 1989 and the first of 1990 there was an epidemic of influenza A in England and Wales followed by an increase in meningococcal disease as judged by the number of isolates submitted to the Meningococcal Reference Laboratory. Data presented in the Lancet (Keith AV Cartwright and colleagues, 1991;338:554-7) showed that the interval between the two epidemics was about two weeks. Similarly timed increases in meningococcal disease also followed influenza epidemics in 1976 and 1957. The Lancet paper presents other less convincing data in addition to the epidemiological findings. A serum antibody titre to influenza A/England of 80 or more was found in 18-5% of 54 normal schoolchildren before the influenza epidemic, in 9% of control sera taken during or after the epidemic, in 28% of 43 patients convalescing from meningococcal disease, and in 91% of 23 people convalescing from influenza. The authors conclude that these serological data support an association between meningococcal disease and recent influenza (odds ratio about 4) but the twofold difference in positive rates in the two populations of control sera to my mind casts doubt on the validity of the conclusion that the difference can be accounted for by chance becoming 9% it could probably by the same chance become 28%. A simultaneous questionnaire study of the incidence of influenza symptoms before the meningococcal outbreak in cases and controls gave equivocal results and had little scientific validity.

It seems, therefore, that there is epidemiological evidence from three different years that an influenza epidemic may be followed two weeks later by an increase in meningococcal disease. The risk is very small, however; the authors estimate that 100 000 cases of influenza might give rise to one case of meningococcal disease. On that basis it would be necessary to immunise a million people against influenza to prevent a single case of postinfluenza meningococcal disease (assuming that the influenza would affect one in 10 of the population) and no changes to current immunisation policy are recommended as a result of this work.

The subjects of the serological study were all over 10 years old and the significance of influenza for meningococcal disease in young children is uncertain. Meningococci sent to the Meningococcal Reference Laboratory after the influenza epidemic were less commonly from children under the age of 10 than usual, suggesting that any predisposing effect of influenza may be less common in younger children. The work is of theoretical interest but it seems to offer no obvious insights as regards the prevention of meningococcal disease in children.