A Case of Cat Scratch Disease Neuroretinitis Confirmed by Polymerase Chain Reaction

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Background: Cat scratch disease neuroretinitis is caused by infection by Bartonella henselae. To demonstrate B. henselae infection, serologic examination is commonly used, but sometimes serologic examination is not adequate for correct diagnosis. Here we present a case of cat scratch disease neuroretinitis confirmed by polymerase chain reaction in addition to serologic examination.

Case: A 55-year-old woman, presenting with headache and high fever, had noticed visual disturbance. The best-corrected visual acuity in her right eye was 0.01. Meningitis, optic neuritis and retinitis were observed and she was treated with oral prednisolone. After repeated questioning, the patient remembered being scratched by a cat. Systemic examination focusing on B. henselae infection was conducted and B. henselae-specific immunoglobulin (Ig) G, but not IgM, was detected in both serum and cerebrospinal fluid. To confirm B. henselae infection, polymerase chain reaction (PCR) analysis using cerebrospinal fluid was performed and the presence of B. henselae-specific DNA was demonstrated. From these results, we diagnosed cat scratch disease neuroretinitis and treated the patient with minocycline hydrochloride together with prednisolone. Following this treatment regimen, the patient’s condition improved, and the best-corrected visual acuity in her right eye increased to 0.6 five months after the onset.

Conclusion: The PCR technique is useful to correctly diagnose cat scratch disease neuroretinitis, if patients exhibit marginal data on B. henselae-specific antibody titer. Jpn J Ophthalmol 2003; 47:405–408 © 2003 Japanese Ophthalmological Society

Key Words: Bartonella henselae infection, cat scratch disease neuroretinitis, polymerase chain reaction.

Introduction

Cat scratch disease, which was initially reported in 1950 by Debre et al., manifests lymph node swelling and fever. It was demonstrated that infection by Bartonella henselae causes cat scratch disease. To ascertain B. henselae infection, serologic examination is most commonly used, yet there are patients exhibiting borderline values of B. henselae-specific antibody titer. Polymerase chain reaction (PCR) theoretically amplifies a minute amount of DNA, and recently this approach has been applied to diagnose cat scratch disease. To the best of our knowledge, there has been only one publication reporting this method to diagnose cat scratch disease neuroretinitis. Here, we report a case of cat scratch disease neuroretinitis confirmed by the PCR method together with serologic examination.

Case

A 55-year-old woman, presenting with headache and high fever, was treated at a local hospital with ceftriaxone sodium. Following these symptoms, she noticed visual loss, OD. Her general condition did not improve and she was referred to another hospital 1 week after the onset. Optic neuritis and meningitis were indicated. Best-corrected visual acuity was 0.03 OD and 1.0 OS. One day later, she was referred to our department for further
Figure 1. (A) Fundus photographs at first visit by a 55-year-old woman whose disease was confirmed by polymerase chain reaction as cat scratch disease neuroretinitis. (B) Results of fluorescein angiography at first visit. (C) Fundus appearance after treatment with minocycline hydrochloride and prednisolone. (D) Results of fluorescein angiography after treatment.
examination. At the initial visit, best-corrected visual acuity was 0.01 OD and 1.0 OS. Optic neuritis and retinal exudates in the posterior pole were noted in both eyes, whereas mild iridocyclitis, retinal and vitreous hemorrhage and macular edema were observed in the right eye (Figure 1A). Fluorescein angiography showed leakage from both optic discs and hyperfluorescence in the area concordant with retinal exudates (Figure 1B). Systemic investigation including lumbar puncture was performed. Complete blood cell count showed a leukocytosis (11,000 per μL) consisting of 67% neutrophils. C-reactive protein was within normal range. Cytology of cerebrospinal fluid (102/3 mm²) suggested infectious meningitis. Therefore, we started treatment with 50 mg of prednisolone together with cefpirome sulfate. One week after the treatment was begun, best-corrected visual acuity was 0.04 OD and 1.0 OS. After repeated questioning, the patient recalled that her left wrist had been scratched by a cat. Then, systemic check-up focusing on B. henselae infection was conducted. Immunoglobulin (Ig) G titers of serum and cerebrospinal fluid against B. henselae were 1: 128 and 1: 4, respectively, while IgM titers were below detectable level.

To confirm B. henselae infection, we performed PCR to detect B. henselae DNA in a sample of the patient’s cerebrospinal fluid. The primer pairs used were 5’GAT-TCAATTGGTTTGAAGGAGGCT3′ and 5’TACAT-CACCAGGACGTATTC3′ (predicted size of product: 418 bp) and 5’AATGATGTCCGTGATCTAGC3′ and 5’CATCAGAAGGAGCAACAATC3′ for nested PCR (predicted size of product: 220 bp). The size of the amplified product obtained was the same as the predicted size of B. henselae DNA shown in positive controls (Figure 2). The patient’s disease was diagnosed as cat scratch disease neuroretinitis and she received oral minocycline hydrochloride for 4 weeks. Two weeks after minocycline hydrochloride and prednisolone treatment, findings of optic neuritis such as disc swelling (Figure 1C) and fluorescein leakage from the optic disc (Figure 1D) decreased and best-corrected visual acuity increased to 0.15 OD and 1.0 OS. No recurrence has been noted and the best-corrected visual acuity in her right eye became 0.6, five months after the onset.

**Discussion**

To date, numerous ophthalmological findings have been reported in patients with cat scratch disease. In particular, neuroretinitis is sight-threatening and, therefore, it is important to diagnose cat scratch neuroretinitis correctly. As noted in this case as well as in others, papillitis, retinitis and iridocyclitis are major findings. There are several ocular diseases exhibiting findings similar to cat scratch disease. Because cat scratch disease is caused by B. henselae infection, detection of B. henselae is a hallmark for diagnosis. Previously, serologic examination was the major approach, yet borderline values of B. henselae-specific antibody titer have been noted in some patients, depending on levels of B. henselae-specific immunity.

Recently, the PCR technique has been applied for diagnosis of cat scratch disease. Taking advantage of this method, which is able to amplify a single copy of B. henselae DNA to 2 cycle numbers, the presence of a minute amount of B. henselae could be revealed. In this case, B. henselae immunoglobulin titers in both serum and cerebrospinal fluid had led to a strong suspicion of cat scratch disease. To further confirm B. henselae infection, PCR was conducted and B. henselae DNA was detected in cerebrospinal fluid.

To the best of our knowledge, only one case has been reported demonstrating the presence of B. henselae by PCR in cat scratch disease neuroretinitis. In the previous report, the patient exhibited remarkable swelling of lymph nodes and, therefore, aspirates from lymph nodes were used for PCR. On the contrary, our case did not exhibit apparent swelling of lymph nodes. However, headache and high fever indicated meningitis, leading us to examine cerebrospinal fluid for the presence of B. henselae. Our case suggests that direct B. henselae invasion rather than an indirect pathophysiologic mechanism appears likely to cause neuroretinitis.
Therefore, PCR is a useful method to correctly and quickly diagnose cat scratch disease neuroretinitis. The samples for PCR analysis should be collected from a variety of organs, depending on the symptoms of patients.

References


