Peripartum Neurological Emergencies in a Critical Care Unit


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Abstract

Background: Neurological emergencies are important causes of admission to the critical care units during pregnancy and puerperium.

Objectives: The aim of the present study is to highlight various causes of peripartum neurological emergencies.

Materials and Methods: A case series study that included women (n=30) with acute deterioration of consciousness, with or without convulsions or neurological deficits, during pregnancy or puerperium, who were received in the critical care unit of Ibn Sina Teaching Hospital in Mosul, Iraq, from September 1st 2005 to August 31st 2006. Participants received careful clinical, radiological, and laboratory evaluation in an attempt to identify the cause of their presentation.

Results: Eclampsia was found to be responsible for two thirds of cases (20 patients). The remaining one third were diagnosed as cerebral venous thrombosis (7 patients), peripartum cerebral infarction (1 patient), intracerebral haemorrhage (1 patient), and acute fatty liver of pregnancy (1 patient). Four of the women with cerebral venous thrombosis were having preeclampsia during pregnancy. Imaging studies, particularly MRI and MR venography, has provided the final diagnosis in most cases. Eclampsia was found more common in women presenting during their first pregnancy, while cerebral venous thrombosis was more common in multiparous women (P = 0.0001). Cortical blindness was significantly associated with eclampsia rather than cerebral venous thrombosis (P = 0.01).

Conclusions: Acute neurological symptoms in the peripartum period represent a diverse group of conditions, requiring careful clinical evaluation and an early access to imaging studies.

Key Words: peripartum, emergencies, eclampsia