Salivary Gland Involvement in Chronic Graft-Versus-Host Disease

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Received: 03/06/2015 Revised: 21/06/2015 Accepted: 29/07/2015

ABSTRACT

Graft-Versus-Host-Disease (GVHD) is the major complication of allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation. It is available in two forms (acute and chronic) chronologically separated by the post-transplant hundredth day. Various target organs and tissues can be infiltrated, like the skin, liver, intestinal tract, conjunctivae and oral tissues including the oral mucosa and the salivary glands.

The purpose of this article is too precise the oral manifestations of chronic GVHD, particularly on the salivary glands and for which systemic immunosuppression as well as corticosteroid treatment may offer symptomatic relief.

Keywords: Graft-Versus-Host-Disease, salivary gland, xerostomia, corticosteroids.

INTRODUCTION

Chronic Graft-Versus-Host-Disease (CGVHD) is a common complication of patients undergoing allogeneic transplantation of hematopoietic cells.¹ The disease is mediated by auto reactive T lymphocytes, which infiltrate various target organs and tissues, like the skin, liver, intestinal tract, conjunctivae and oral tissues including the oral mucosa and the salivary glands.²⁻⁴

Oral manifestations can be the first signs of cGVHD, and might be considered as a disease marker.¹ They are observed in the majority of cases of cGVHD, and are considered an important cause of morbidity.⁵

Involvement of cGVHD on the salivary glands will cause a lack of saliva production.⁶ Hyposcretion or xerostomia will influence the oral mucosa by a reduced quantity and altered quality of the saliva.⁷

The immunosuppressive drugs including corticosteroids and cyclosporine are the most frequently used in the treatment of cGVHD.¹

The aim of this article is to report clinical case of a patient with recurrent cGVHD suffering from xerostomia which treatment with corticosteroids showed a marked improvement.

CASE REPORT

The patient (O.A) a 36-year-old man was referred to the department of Medicine and Surgery Oral of the Dentistry Clinic of Monastir, Tunisia for dental care.
The patient is followed in the national center for bone marrow transplant for very severe idiopathic aplastic anemia. He made an allograft in July 2009.

Figure 1: Dry and red conjunctiva, cornea irritated.

The patient has discontinued his immunosuppressive treatment for a year ago and is currently under a local antifungal treatment.

The extra oral examination revealed a painful and limited mouth opening and ocular conjunctivitis (figure 1), hypopigmented beaches at neck and hyperpigmented at trunk.

Figure 2: Tongue dried, smooth and depapillated.

The intraoral examination revealed a red and inflamed gum, pseudo lichenoides lesions at inner sides of the cheeks, dried and depapillated tongue (figure 2). Also we note a remarkable dry mouth.

A sugar cube test confirmed this xerostomia, which revealed that this one after 5 minutes was very little wet under tongue (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Sugar placed during 5 minutes under the tongue (a) and it was a little wet after 5 minutes (b).

Figure 4: Biopsy of the salivary glands.

The laboratory tests reveal a normal hemostatic balance and viral serology AIDS, hepatitis B and C negative.

A salivary gland biopsy was realized for this patient in our department of the lower lip (figure 4). The result of the histological exam showed severe fibrosis of
the minor salivary glands and reduced number of acini (Figure 5).

From these oral manifestations, a cGVHD has been diagnosed and the patient has been remapped to the national bone marrow transplant center for care where he received treatment with systemic corticosteroids.

Currently the patient has a marked improvement in the general state. Oral signs regressed with more salivation after his treatment by corticosteroids (Figure 6).

A sugar cube test confirmed this improvement, which revealed that this one after 5 minutes was wet and partially melted (Figure 7).

**DISCUSSION**

CGVHD is the major complication of allogeneic hematopoietic stem cell transplantation [6] and is defined when the clinical manifestations comes after more than a hundred days. [8]

Frequent sites with cGVHD involvement were skin, conjunctiva, liver, gastrointestinal tract and oral tissues including the oral mucosa and the salivary glands. [2] The oral manifestations of cGVHD consist of xerostomia, erythema, leukoplakia, lichenoid lesions, ulcers, mucosal atrophy, sclerodermatous changes and pyogenic granuloma. [2]

The oral mucosa may be involved in up to 90% of the patients that present cGVHD. [1,9] Involvement of cGVHD on the salivary and lacrimal glands can cause many manifestations such as seen in Sjogren’s syndrome-like manifestations including hyposcretion of saliva and tears. [6] Chronic GVHD of the salivary glands cause quantitative and qualitative alterations in saliva, including altered concentrations of electrolytes, epidermal growth factor, and salivary proteins [8] Xerostomia can cause difficulty with speaking, chewing and swallowing, as well as recurrent candidiasis.

In salivary gland hypofunction associated with cGVHD, a biopsy of the
minor salivary glands can provide valuable confirmatory information. [8] The reduced number of acini, inflammatory infiltration often with associated fibrosis characterizes salivary gland cGVHD.

The mechanisms underlying cGVHD are not well understood but the dental professionals should be aware about oral manifestations of GVHD and its treatments. [6,8]

The general therapeutic options in cGVHD have been rather limited until recently, consisting of immunosuppressive agents, mainly methylprednisolone and cyclosporine. [10] Systemic immunosuppressive therapy is indicated for extensive cGVHD. [6] However, the disadvantage of systemic therapy can cause opportunistic infections and many complications.

Topical management of oral cGVHD may be indicated as complementary therapy to systemic treatment in locally refractory cases or as the sole therapy in cases whereby the oral cavity is the only site involved, this is may prevent the severe side effects associated with systemic treatments. [2] The primary objectives of oral cGVHD management are to reduce symptoms and maintain oral function. [8]

The first-line therapy for oral mucosal cGVHD is intensive topical corticosteroid therapy that can be delivered in various formulations like solutions (Dexamethasone, Budesonide, Prednisolone, Triamcinolone) and gels (creams and ointments). [8]

Other treatment are indicated like the application of tacrolimus ointment used in combination with a corticosteroid solution in patients that do not have an adequate response to topical steroid therapy alone, [1,8] and intralesional injections of triamcinolone acetonide particularly for resolution of refractory and symptomatic localized ulcerative lesions. [8]

The salivary gland damage can be reversible thanks to treatment with corticoid drugs or refractory for this treatment, then we need to use saliva substitutes who help to reduce this xerostomia. Salivation can be stimulated by gustatory and masticatory means through the use of sugar-free chewing gums and candies. [8]

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, diagnosis of cGVHD can be established by the presence of oral manifestations where the role of the dental professionals. The treatment can significantly improve the patient's clinical status.

REFERENCES


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