Spinal Cord ependymomas: Neurological Impact on Quality of life

Laurel Westcarth, MBA. MSN, ANP-BC

Case Study:
50-year-old with several years history of vague symptoms that progressed to: occipital ridge pain, intermittent numbness and tingling in the extremities, electric storm sensation throughout the extremities, difficulty ambulating on uneven surfaces & unable to sense ability to void.

Objectives:
1. Review the prevalence of spinal Ependymomas
2. Describe the common neurological symptoms
3. Review common treatments
4. Discuss the role of the Advanced Practice Provider

Prevalence:
- Rare tumors of central nervous system (CNS)
- 60% of all intramedullary tumors in adults
- Mostly benign
- Slow growing
- Common in 4th and 5th decade of life

Classification:
- Grade I benign (myxopapillary)
- Grade II semi- benign “classic” (ependymoma, grade 2)
- Grade III the most infiltrative & malignant type (anaplastic ependymoma)

Spinal Ependymoma: MRI of spinal enhancing intramedullary C2 lesion axis (brain, C, T, L) and lumbar puncture for CSF analysis as warranted

Symptoms:
- Back pain- most frequently reported
- Radicular or local pain
- Motor weakness
- Numbness and/or tingling
- Sphincter or sexual dysfunction
- Compression of spinal cord in some cases may lead to severe disability
- Cervical spine: spasticity, gait ataxia, sensory loss, paresthesia
- Lumbar spine: incontinence, radicular back pain, leg pain, asymmetric weakness
- Other symptoms- tumors location dependent

Treatments:
- Surgery- Goal standard treatment goal of gross total resection (GTR) Although advocated, the risk of permanent disability is approximately between 3-50%.
- Radiation therapy when GTR is not achieved
- Intrathecal chemotherapy for recurrent grade III and meningeval progression.
- A multidisciplinary treatment approach should be taken with spinal ependymoma since it remains challenging and has lasting neurological impact affecting quality of life.

Pre-Surgery Work-up:
- Spinal Ependymoma: MRI of spinal enhancing intramedullary C2 lesion axis (brain, C, T, L) and lumbar puncture for CSF analysis as warranted
- Tumor Specific: MRI of C spine: revealed an ependymoma is one of the most common types of intramedullary tumors

Post-Operative Imaging

Imaging Timeline: Pre-Operative:
- MRI C spine: pre-surgery C2 lesion, Sag T2
- MRI C spine: pre- surgery, T1 contrast C2 enhancing intramedullary lesion

Symptoms Post surgery:
- Ataxia
- Bandlike tightness around waist
- Incomplete teta-paresis
- Neuropathy right side of body
- Difficulty with bowel and bladder
- Diminished sensation (improving)
- Working a few hours

One year Post-op:
- No longer able to work (temporarily)
- Gait Ataxia
- Increased sensory symptoms
- Fatigue
- Headache

Long Term Outcome:
- GTR 10-year progression free survival of 80-90%
- Lumbar spine, better neurological outcome than cervical and thoracic
- Ependymoma peak 4th and 5th decade of life- during active work and social period
- Post surgical neurological impairment: affect daily life activities: work, sports & recreation
- Ongoing neurological deficits: impaired ability to work (job modification or change), decreased engagement in activities

Implication for APPs:
- As advanced Practice providers, we can play a role by optimizing the patient’s pre-surgery visit by providing the necessary referrals: Neuro-Oncology, rehab, pain and other services based on neurological symptoms for baseline evaluation.
- Evaluate for enrollment in the Primary tumor research and outcome network (PTRON) study which collects health related quality of life outcome.
- Refer to inpatient rehabilitation and community services post-surgery as needed.

References: