Hematology-2013

OMICS Group Conferences
Accelerating Scientific Discovery

International Conference on
Hematology & Blood Disorders

September 23-25, 2013 Raleigh, USA

CNS postransplant lymphoproliferative disorders: Diagnostic challenges

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Abstract

The presence of post-transplant lymphoproliferative disorders (PTLD) involving the central nervous system (CNS) is uncommon and can prove diagnostically challenging for the clinician and pathologist alike. The clinical and imaging characteristics of CNS PTLD can overlap those of infection, hemorrhage and primary CNS tumors making distinction from these entities difficult. When present, PTLD tends to occur in isolation, sparing other organ systems. It is therefore important to maintain a high index of suspicion for the disorder.

Partly due to their rarity, CNS PTLD has not been fully characterized. While the understanding of the disease is increasing, the diagnosis and sometimes accurate classification of the brain PTLD lesions remains challenging. We recently published a series of pediatric autopsies with CNS PTLD, few of which exhibiting secondary meningeal involvement. In our series, PTLD was found outside the CNS in more than half of cases.

It is important to consider CNS PTLD in this immunosupressed population at the very high risk for opportunistic infections as well. In the presence of abnormal brain imaging, the diagnosis could be made by CSF examination. The importance of CNS imaging with subsequent brain biopsy whenever clinically appropriate cannot be underestimated in this setting.

Although my talk will be centered on pathology of the CNS PTLD (including a recent, updated WHO classification of the PTLD lesions) I believe that the discussion will be of interest not only for pathologists, but also for any clinical provider involved in the care of patients with solid organ or bone marrow transplants.

Biography

Dr. Gabriela Gheorghe is board certified in hematopathology in addition to pediatric pathology and anatomic and clinical pathology. For the last 4 years, Dr. Gheorghe has provided hematopathology expertise to the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. A graduate of Institutul de Medicina Timisoara, Romania, and Dr. Gheorghe is a Director of Hematology at The CHW, has published several papers in reputed Journals and is an active member of the Society for Pediatric Pathology and Children's Oncology Group.